

what are you doing to me now

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what are you doing to me now

by [madeofbees](#)

Summary

Will has a major depressive episode. Hannibal helps him out of it.

I wrote this as therapy, please be careful of triggers, esp depression and suicidal ideation.
Stay safe <3

Notes

- okay so. embarrassing. is what this is. I was too depressed to work on any WIPs or sequels and so I decided to write depressed!will, and three and a half weeks and 31k later, here we are. I'm sharing in the hope that it might help someone, the way it's helped me, the way other people's fics help me. it's not ✨ high art ✨
- the timeline is. nonexistent. it's set somewhere s2ish but in an au where things kind of settle after will gets out of prison and go back to something resembling normality ish. however. i played fast and loose with quotes and events, sprinkled them in as needed. it's therapy i can do what i want
- i'm so tired I forget the other things I needed to say, tomorrow!me will have to deal with that
- titles from *the blue* by Gracie Abrams

i wonder if you know, if you can tell i'm losing, i'm going down without a fight, i don't know how you do it

1

Most of the time, Will isn't depressed.

Most of the time, when his mind starts to slip and spill, he's manic. Or close enough to use the word, even if it isn't entirely correct. He's never been able to explain why, or how exactly, and it gets the gist across. Doctor Lecter even rubber stamps the mistruth, telling Will that the details are nobody's business but his own. And his doctor's, of course.

Most of the time, Will spills outward. The encephalitis, that was a kind of spill. Whatever parts of Hobbs weren't inflamed, also outwards. Will thinks he'll drown someone some day, if he hasn't already. The dissociative fugues are more evidence—he is so outside of himself that even he isn't home.

Most of the time, Will is anxious and uncomfortable. He doesn't like eye contact, he doesn't like performing, he doesn't feel *totally functional and more or less sane*, but he gets by. He feels too much, doesn't like that either, but at least he's used to it. The constant overstimulation almost like a friend, a familiar face that he wants to punch, maybe, but familiar nonetheless. Familiar is good.

Most of the time, Will feels everything.

Today, Will feels nothing.

It's been like this for a while, but the slope was so slow, the downward spiral hypnotizing, and he isn't used to it. Didn't recognize the signs. He should have, probably, it was affecting his work at the very least, but not caring enough about the bloodlust didn't feel like a symptom, it felt like normality.

That's what should've tipped him off. Feeling normal. What he assumes is normal, at least.

He wonders, indifferently, why Doctor Lecter hasn't noticed. Nor has Hannibal; the distinction in title helps him compartmentalize, keep the empathy in check, even if they're only ever conversations between friends. It's different, the rules change, and so Will lets the honorific stay. Doctor Lecter, world renowned psychiatrist, failing to recognize a major depressive episode. His friend, his only real friend, maybe the only one he's ever had, also fails.

Maybe it's in my head, Will thinks, lying prone on the floor in front of the cold fireplace. *I could have made it up, I've made up everything else.*

Or maybe you're just not important enough to notice.

Will sighs quietly. He doesn't have the strength to argue with the voice, cruel and always on point. He spends his days letting voices in, nights trying to shut them out, and by the time of — now, he has no idea what time it is, or even what day—arguing with the ones that sound like him is too much. Such a losing battle there's no point in fighting.

Dogs move around him, coming and going as they please. Winston stays close, Will thinks. He last walked off to the right and Will is facing left, so he can't be sure. He knows he fed them recently, and let them out, because that's the only task he seems capable of doing. He's not sure if he can keep himself alive, not sure if he cares enough to bother, but the dogs come first. It's become a mantra, when he forces himself to his feet and moves his body to the kitchen, opens the door and feels the fresh air he used to like and now nothings. The Dogs Come First. It's good, it gets him up, reminds him to go to the bathroom, put food in his mouth, chew and swallow, have a glass of water. None of these things hold any appeal, but without them he can't take care of the dogs, and so he does them.

Maybe, Will thinks, he didn't notice because:

His mind reels out possible answers like it's multiple choice.

A. I don't matter.

B. The emptiness doesn't matter.

C. I'm a baby, a stupid fucking baby.

D. He has other patients, other friends. You're the hermit, how you even managed to trick your way into his social circle only god knows. He's busy.

E. He doesn't pay much, if any attention to you.

F. It's your fault for caring. This doesn't make sense, isn't a possible answer to his question, but that doesn't seem relevant.

G. He knows and doesn't care.

H. All of the above.

Will chooses H, is vaguely glad he doesn't have to fill in the bubble with a number two pencil because he's not sure he has one, and also that seems like a lot of effort, too many steps for something that doesn't even fucking exist. He doesn't need to defend himself against nonexistent charges of pencil neglect.

Secret bonus option I: he knows, he cares, and he's working on getting you locked up. He's on the phone with Chilton right now arranging for the men in white coats to come and take you away. Maybe it's for the best.

Will isn't sure when he last talked to Hannibal. He missed a session recently, he knows that, because Jack had driven him to the crime scene and he didn't have a car to leave in. Last week, the week before, he's not sure. But he knows he told Hannibal, complained to his friend about his boss, told his doctor he wouldn't be coming in, and was excused for the day. He doesn't think he's had a session since then, so it must have been a while. Maybe that's why he's so deflated, because he hasn't had his—.

His nothing. As nothing as everything else. Fuck Doctor Lecter for not knowing or caring, and fuck Hannibal too for not—not being—checking in, on his friend, who's having a hard

time. This is wildly unfair, Will knows that too, and doesn't care. It's freeing, kind of. The not caring. Except that he thinks he might be dead but can't muster up the energy to care enough one way or the other. He should check his pulse. Is that a thing people can do, check their own pulse? How would you know where the beat was coming from, yourself or the corpse?

Wrong wrong wrong, all wrong. What the fuck is wrong with you? Idiot.

Yeah, okay, Will thinks mildly, stares at the floor in front of his face. It's dirty. Maybe he should clean.

He wants to laugh at this, the idea of doing something so drastic as *cleaning*, but he can't bring himself to do that, either. He huffs out a breath to prove his diaphragm works, sinks deeper into the floor, seeping into it like a bad spill, a Will-shaped stain. There's something there, a joke about crime scene tape—the kind they use to outline bodies, not the yellow *DO NOT CROSS*—but he can't put it together. It's fine. It doesn't matter. There's not anyone to tell it to and even if there was, who cares. Not Will.

I wish he cared, Will thinks for the thousandth time. Then he thinks about lifting his head and letting his neck muscles muscles go slack, crashing his skull into the floor, over and over again until there's nothing left. It sounds nice. Sounds like it'd require a lot of physical energy, so it won't get done. Maybe later, when he's feeling better.

I won't want to then, he thinks sullenly. Like *later-when-he's-feeling-better* is a real time and place that might happen one day and not a lie he parrots to make himself feel worse. There is no after, or before. There is only now, stretching out on an infinite plane, like the floorboards. Gray and dusty and dull and interminable.

Limbo is real, it was on the floor all along.

Will is concerned by this thought, objectively. The lack of substance, meaning, that wasn't normal. He could be having a stroke. The encephalitis could be back.

No, then he'd be hot, and he's so cold. He resents being reminded of his physical body, resents himself for existing. Not only would warming up involve a great deal of energy, he'd also be forced to admit that he deserved things like warmth and comfort, and.

And Will is better off not deserving. It hurts less. More of this dull ache, impossible heaviness than the acute stabbing of having needs that weren't being met, would never be. No needs, no problem. He stays on the floor, stays cold, because Hannibal Lecter—

No. Absolutely not. You will not blame him for not wanting you. Who the fuck would?

Will sucks in a sharp breath at the acute stabbing, centered in his diaphragm and spreading outwards. He welcomes it, deserves it. It's something, and nothing was getting boring, less sane. He imagines Hannibal sliding the knife into his abdomen, holding him steady, letting Will lean on him as he bleeds out. The last of the pain, gone. Finally. And in his arms.

He's perfect and you're trash. How dare you question his dismissal. I thought you knew better.

Will does know better. He says so, out loud, to the empty room. "I know." The words echo, ricochet back at him like shrapnel.

If you knew, you'd shut the fuck up, now wouldn't you? You don't deserve to be killed by him.

The knife twists, heat spills out. He's not cold anymore. He burns with the humiliation of having dared to desire being held by the eminent, immaculate, faultless, flawless Doctor Hannibal Lecter. Being murdered by him. It's such a pretty thought, it cuts like a knife to his throat. He feels his blood drain, attempts to wish it into being, can't care enough. He'll die eventually if he never moves again. Dehydration, probably. Or spontaneous idiopathic unaliveness. Maybe he can force his heart to beat slower, slower, until it stops.

No, he can't do that. He's tried. The damn thing just keeps going. Like there's a point to his existence, a greater cosmic reason for his being that wouldn't allow him death. He knows there isn't any justification for him to draw breath, and yet when he tries to stop that instead, he can't do that, either.

Why, Will thinks, am I sentenced to life? What did I do to deserve this?

Everything. And nothing. He hasn't done enough, but what he has managed is too much, unacceptable. Disfigured and ugly.

Will sighs again, dissolves further into the floor, sinking lower. He doesn't have to be alive for long, his passivity will take over soon enough. His body is so *heavy*, he isn't going anywhere. It's only a matter of time.

Don't you think you're being a little dramatic?

Of course he is. He has nothing to complain about. His life is good on paper. Good job. Good house. Good dogs. Good friend. There's no reason for him to be lying on the floor, unable to move, vaguely wishing he was dead but not enough to do anything about it. He has no reason to. No reason not to. There's. The nothing is coming back like intravenous novocaine, and the numbness is both a relief and a disappointment.

He feels nothing. *It's fine*, he thinks. *Fine enough.*

Will feels part of his mind detach, float away, excising itself to calmer waters. That's fine, too. He doesn't exist, why have a brain when there's nothing. It's all the same.

He drifts. Sinks. His body remains stubbornly solid, refusing to deflate meaningfully, unable to be absorbed into the wood grain. Maybe he should go outside, maybe the earth would be more welcoming. Probably not, it's January and the ground is frozen. Maybe that's why he's cold, maybe he's frozen to death.

No, idiot, you wouldn't feel cold. Don't you know anything?

He doesn't.

He does, he's well-versed in death by hypothermia, knows the physiological timeline. He's well-versed in death by anything, everything.

He doesn't, if he did he wouldn't still be alive.

Such a fucking drama queen attention whore. Poor Will, so pathetic, lying on his floor. Throwing a tantrum because a boy doesn't like him.

That isn't fair, and Will does know that. This isn't because of Hannibal, this is the deep dark crevasse that has always been, slowly splitting and spilling underground rivers, gaping and cavernous. Hannibal—if he was here, if things were different, he might help. But he isn't hurting—

Lying bitch.

Okay fine, his existence destroys Will, tears him apart. He hadn't known he'd been born with half a soul until he met Hannibal. It hadn't hurt before him, because Will hadn't known it should. Was unaware of the void. Now, now he is fucked up all on his own, would be here regardless, but the *pain*, the longed-for stabbing, that is. New. Of Hannibal, yes.

Remember when you didn't have needs? You were such a good boy until you fixated on the most laughably unattainable man on the planet. You deserve this. You're pathetic, you belong on the floor. He belongs on a throne. Who gave you the fucking audacity to want him?

Nobody. He just does, can't stop himself. He craves wholeness, and he lies alone on his floor surrounded by dogs and dust and nothing. All is as it should be.

It isn't only Hannibal. Will clings to this truth, safe in his own special brand of insanity, away from *pathetic* and *obsessed* and *codependent*. There was no inciting incident, from Hannibal or anyone else. Nothing happened. Will doesn't remember lying down on the floor at all, has no idea what made him think this was a good solution. He feels it in his bones, now. The need to be here and only here and nowhere else. The impossibility of movement. This isn't Hannibal, it's only him, he's the problem. His body has given up, his mind has vacated the premises.

Will has left the building.

Will closes his eyes. He isn't going to sleep, thinks he hasn't for a while, the heaviness of his eyelids more evidence. He doesn't care. He has no reason to look at the floor, he may as well not expend effort on blinking. The weight of seeing nothing.

The dark is better. He tries to close his ears too, but that would involve lifting his arms. Pool noodles encased in cement, pressing against his sides. Useless, just like the rest of him. Good. Fitting.

His ears keep working, though, and that's not good. He can't stop himself from listening, analyzing, pinpointing, labeling, and he doesn't want to. He wants to do nothing. He is nothing, he ought to be doing nothing. Instead he hears a dog yawn, stretch, wander out of the room. It isn't time to feed them again, he's pretty sure. Winston keeps him on a strict

schedule. He hears the wind whistling and the dead and desiccated leaves that make up his land rustle and clatter against his windows. He hears his own breathing, feels attacked by it. He should turn on the fan for the white noise, but he can't move and doesn't deserve it, so it works out okay. He hears his stomach growl, ignores it. That at least is easy, even if he had the will to move the refrigerator is empty except for the requisite baking soda, and while there might be crackers somewhere in his cabinets, hunting them down is as ridiculous a notion as him hunting down serial killers for a living. The only food he's certain of is the dog food.

Will allows himself a deep inhale, feels his chest rising as his lungs inflate, settle as he breathes out. Maybe he will take a nap, just a little doze, nothing dramatic. Nothing to imply he deserved sleep. More unavoidable than anything else. He'll be sore when he wakes up, but he'll be sore if he doesn't sleep, that's also unavoidable.

Useless piece of trash. Can't even torture yourself right. Sleep deprivation is the first page in the torture handbook. A real depressed person wouldn't sleep, wouldn't want to or indulge themselves. Wretched thing.

Will agrees, and drifts a little farther from himself.

2

Will opens his eyes. It's dark now, time has passed, however improbably. He's sentenced to purgatory for the rest of his natural life, then, if not longer. He has to live this night, and the next, and the next, in an endless succession of mind numbing nothing. Underexposed black and white photography, muddy and indistinct without contrast. He is so tired. How is he possibly expected to be *totally functional and more or less sane* when there is *so much* time left to pass?

Then I'll sleep forever, Will thinks petulantly. He likes the idea, though. Briefly considers the series of events that would result in a forever sleep, dismisses them as too difficult, like everything else.

Because you're incapable of functioning at all, let alone in totality. Can't even overdose yourself into a coma. Disgusting.

His stomach cramps, and a groan escapes through gritted teeth. It's been a long time since he's eaten. Is this what he really wants, starving to death with food a room away, delivery a phone call away? Because it feels stupid, like a tantrum. Even so, it continues to remain the least objectionable option, and so Will stays where he is. He doesn't feel hungry away, just the one cramp. It's so easy to do nothing.

Except not hear. He still hears the wind, the leaves, the dogs. Feels his heart beating against the floor. Cold wrapped around his toes, the backs of his thighs, the outer edges of his arms. He's wearing an old tank top and boxers, not very warm. It's only going to get colder as the night draws on, it might be genuinely unpleasant.

He doesn't care.

Time stretches on, or doesn't. Will doesn't know. Either the temperature stabilizes or he's too numb to feel it get colder, and what's the difference, he has no impact on the situation. He thinks Winston should have gotten him by now, and then, dredged up from the muck in the swamp behind the crumbling castle that had once been his palace, he remembers leaving extra food out. He has already made sure The Dogs Come First, he can relax. They're safe. Well-fed. He has performed his duties admirably.

Passingly, he corrects himself. Barely adequately. But yes, done. Good for me.

That's not right, he doesn't deserve good. Deserves nothing but the cold winding down his feet and the pain in his hipbones, shoulders, knees, ankles, face, skull where they press against the hard wood. He'll have bruises. Can it be called lividity if he's still alive?

Settle down, blood, it's time to rest.

More nonsense, but no more concern. It's a relief, to not worry anymore. He might be crazy, he might not be, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters.

Hannibal matters.

Will tries to make a sound, any sound, as long as it was disgusting and self-deprecating, can't manage. He doesn't exactly care about this, but he wonders if it means his body is weakening, starting to shut down. It feels early for that, but what does he know. Not the time or day or when he's last eaten or drank, fuck, maybe he is dying.

Good. Finally.

Ah yes but will Hannibal care?

"Fuck off," Will rasps. He can make sound, then. Disappointing.

Will he come to the funeral? Will he lay flowers on your grave? How will he react to the news, do you think? Once upon a time he was worried you were dead; now he doesn't bother to check. I doubt he'll care at all. He'll go to the funeral, of course, as a courtesy to a patient. To keep up appearances. He'll likely bring something ostentatious yet refined to your grave, for appearances. And then he'll go home and never think about you again.

Will squeezes his eyes closed against the pain, twin knives in his heart and gut. The one in his intestines, not eating does that, fades. The one left by the chilling assessment stays. He rides it out with gritted teeth and, eventually, it abates, too. Grief comes in waves, they say. He must be mourning the death of the self. Cause of death: neglect. It sounded better than spontaneous idiopathic unaliveness, at any rate.

Remember when he said he didn't care about the lives you saved, only your life? Wasn't that nice? Why'd you go and fuck it all up? I thought that's what you wanted, my mistake.

Hot tears collect in the corners of his eyes, and the self-loathing is so great he thinks he might die right now this second, suffocate on his putrefaction, but he doesn't. It passes, he can

breathe again. Waves drowning him and bringing him back to life with the tides. The wind howling along with the crashing surf.

Yes, Hannibal had said that. Definitely Hannibal and not Doctor Lecter; what he'd actually said was *I'm your friend, Will. I don't care about the lives you save; I care about your life, and your life is separating from reality.*

Will wonders if Hannibal knows how much of their conversations have been recorded and carefully stored away in his mind palace. He wonders if Hannibal knows that every time he says Will's name, part of him dies. How he's gotten off thinking about it.

Horrible boy, how dare you.

Will wonders if there's ever been a time in his life where reality *wasn't* separate, visible but unreachable across a flooded bridge. He has never felt comfortable in reality, or gotten what all the fuss was about.

Will wonders if Hannibal has ever gotten off thinking about how Will says his name, if he prefers the familiarity of Hannibal or the submissive formality of Doctor Lecter, the way Will sometimes used to draw it out, put too much emphasis on the title. Will isn't allowed to wonder this, he knows. Is stabbed for his efforts, again and again. Can't he just bleed out already. He's so tired.

Will wonders if Hannibal can be summoned just by thinking about him. He knows the answer: obviously not, or he'd have been here long ago. But he still hears the familiar rumble of a familiar engine, almost inaudible under the wind. The heaviness of the air, or maybe that's just Will. He swears he hears the absence of the engine, and then footsteps. Crunching, on the leaves. Dogs bark outside.

Will forces himself real enough to listen to their tone, make sure they aren't scared or angry. He doesn't like this, but The Dogs Come First. There's always the possibility of a wild animal making its way onto his land, or an intruder. They quiet quickly, and nobody sounds upset. Will is glad, he loves his dogs, and genuinely doesn't think he has the capacity to move. He will, if he has to, for them. But it's better not to.

He hears the front door open. He *hates* this, is terrified at the idea of being found. Helpless on his own floor. For no reason, nothing has happened. He's in his underwear. Someone does care enough about him to see how he's doing, and this is how he thanks them. What if it is Hannibal, he'll have to—to *explain*, or—*apologize*, but he isn't sure what for, other than himself. He should peel himself off the floor. Find a mask and put it on so he's not contagious. Send whoever it was on their way.

He doesn't. He stays on the floor as Hannibal's shoes come into view, standing before him. Will closes his eyes, feels tears fall, feels the knife twist deeper, deeper. The notion that he'd wanted this, wanted Hannibal to come rescue him, is laughable. He is a fully grown adult man trapped on his living room floor because of nothing. He wants to impress Hannibal, now and always, and not like this. Not when he reeks of pathetic desperation and sour sweat. He wants to tell him to go away. He knows he can't, even if he could speak he couldn't banish

his other half, couldn't bear to be the cause of him leaving. Even if it's all he wants, to be left alone to decompose.

Hannibal crouches, and Will can see his eyes. This is probably the point, so Hannibal can see him. Usually, Will doesn't mind eye contact as much, when it's Hannibal. Now it burns through him, a laser engraving his initials into Will's skull. He doesn't want to look at him, doesn't want him to see the tears. Only a few at a time, but steady. He doesn't know what there is to see, if anything is left in him to be seen.

He sees Hannibal's lips move. He's so fucking beautiful, it isn't fair. How is Will expected to be when he's forced to worship divinity in a person suit only to be abandoned when the timer is up? How can he live knowing God was within his grasp, but not for him? Turned away at the gates. No vacancies. Not for him.

The knife twists again, and he can't stop the broken gasp at the pain. Hannibal's brows furrow. Will has displeased his God. Only a miracle has kept him so close for so long. He doesn't deserve this, doesn't deserve to want to worship at his altar. He closes his eyes again. Maybe he'll go away, maybe he was never here at all.

No, the dogs greeted him. He is here.

Will, against all odds, is also here. Not dead yet.

He had wanted to die in Hannibal's arms, at his hands. He can't do that, of course, doesn't deserve his hands, strong and warm and perfect and dangerous. But maybe he can die near him. That would be enough.

There is pressure on Will's cheek. Warm and solid. Will thinks this might be why people enjoy reality, if they have realities that include this. Surprisingly soft.

It clicks, then. Hannibal cupping his cheek. Will curls into himself like a dead spider, except the floor is in the way and his limbs are so heavy, and he doesn't move. His toes bend, release, and that's all. He wants to remove himself from the Iron Maiden of Hannibal's touch. He manages a weak twitch of his neck, and even that is exhausting.

Fine. Let him touch. It only hurts Will, not Hannibal. That's not so bad. A hundred thousand cuts when his hand slides down to Will's neck, agony when he doesn't squeeze. He's measuring his pulse, he thinks.

You're going to infect him, if he keeps touching you. Toxic like radiation. Selfish.

Will knows the truth of this. He tries to move, roll over, away, but he had unformed enough to become one with the floor after all, and he can't. So, so heavy. Hannibal's hand an impossible weight. Fuck, Will wants him, craves the press of his skin. He would die for this, gladly. Maybe he'll expire when Hannibal inevitably pulls away. When he leaves for the last time.

Will is not desirable. He is not mysterious or fascinating, worthy of interest. He is a barely-human disaster in a body that's blessedly out of gas, he has coasted to a stop and remains,

stranded. He is broken down and useless and pointless, and any second Hannibal will realize and leave. At least then it'll be done, and he can disappear in peace.

And there it is.

Hannibal stands and walks out of Will's line of sight. Will dies, and is reborn: he isn't leaving, Will hears him in the kitchen, muttering about the state of his fridge, pantry. Water splashes, so he's refilling the water for the dogs. That's good, Will knew from the irregular lapping that they weren't out, but better more than not enough. He hears nothing with their food, assures himself that he did a good job of making sure The Dogs Came First. He succeeded, however small the task.

Hannibal continues to move, make sounds Will can no longer immediately recognize. Attempting to pull a culinary feast from his barren kitchen. Will doesn't love this, wishes he would leave and get it over with, but at least it's futile. There's comfort in knowing even his kitchen is beyond redemption.

Hannibal is back, sitting cross legged on the floor in front of Will. He is holding a mug of hot tea, attempting to get Will to take it.

Just give up, I'm already dead. Leave my corpse in peace. I promise I'll think of you as I rot.

Hannibal sets the tea aside. He is prepared, more than Will anticipated. His next offering—*how dare you call a gift from a god an offering, sacrilegious swine*—is a glass of water with a straw. Will wonders where the straw came from. It doesn't occur to him to drink until Hannibal gently nudges it forward, turns the glass so the straw bumps against his lips. It shouldn't feel so intimate. It does.

Will focuses all of himself on pleasing Hannibal. On pretending he could be good enough one day. He draws his lower lip into his mouth, trying to wet it. He hadn't realized how dry his mouth was, his tongue like a sandpaper sponge left in the sun to bake. He swallows, reaches for the straw with his tongue, wrapping his lips around it and sucking.

Obscene. I thought you knew better. Horrible.

The water is so cold it burns, and a full body shudder wracks him, forcing lax muscles to clench and flex for the first time in as long as it's been, and Will lets out a shuddering moan at the pain. His stomach cramps at the intrusion, and as he marvels at how good the cold feels, he knows he can't keep it down. Still, he drinks greedily. This will be his last drink, he decides. This softness from Hannibal will be allowed, and then all evidence will be destroyed. Including and especially Will Graham.

His stomach flips, then flops. Seasick queasy waves like the tides that drowned him, and Will turns to the side, away from Hannibal, forces himself up onto one elbow, and throws up onto the floor. He is humiliated. His shoulder, where most of his weight rests, is excruciating. His back, throat, stomach, elbow aren't any better. He thinks he feels something twinge dangerously, can't track down where. He shoves himself away from the mess before collapsing. He's facing away from Hannibal, which is good. Away from the water, which is fine, he'd had his last sip. Looking directly at his own sick, which. He probably deserves, so

why not. There's nothing there, really, anyway, just a small puddle of water, frothy with stomach acid. Doesn't smell that bad, even so close. Nothing to smell.

I am nothing, Will thinks, closes his eyes. *I have nothing, there is nothing inside of me, I have reached nothingness.*

He starts to drift, is interrupted so cruelly he cries out as his body is moved, reshaped. He is sitting now, kind of, propped against Hannibal, reclining in his arms, and he has never been so acutely aware of the absolute and immediate need for death. This is what he'd wanted, where was the knife?

The tea is back. The mug presses insistently against his mouth. There is no argument in the mug, and Will is so tired, and he'll probably just throw it up, too, so he relents. Lets Hannibal replace what he'd lost. The warmth makes it easier to keep down, but the cramps start again almost immediately, and he turns his face away. He is met with Hannibal's chest, also warm, also solid, and he knows—*knows*—he cannot lose himself right now. He cannot burrow into Hannibal's heat and reality, into his arms where he might be safe. Hannibal is not his to touch, or disappear into.

Fine, Will. I'm tired too. If you want to pretend and get yourself even more broken, I clearly can't stop you. Just know that when he leaves and doesn't come back, it's because of this. You are too much, needy, and nobody wants you. You are a burden. You will not burden him. You cannot, because he doesn't care enough to be burdened. But yes, you can pretend. If you must.

Hannibal had brought a knife after all, Will could feel it in his diaphragm, lodged in place. Molten lead replaces his blood. He wants to bleed out again. He needs to get away from Hannibal, but he is being held in place against the man he loves, and—

I could pretend, Will thinks. *For a little bit, at least. As a treat.* He closes wet eyes. Lets himself feel the weight of Hannibal's arms, cradling him. He cries silently, reminds himself how pathetic he is, asks himself how he thinks this will help, feels what it must be like to be whole.

What it would be like to be held like this in bed, under the blankets and most of the way asleep. What the hand on his face could have meant, if he'd been kissed instead of analyzed. Waking up warm and safe and protected, every day, forever.

Will grimaces, twisting a smile upside down and backwards, his breath coming faster. He is in so much pain, he doesn't know where lying on the floor meets spontaneous—fuck what had he come up with, spontaneous—idiopathic unaliveness, that's it. His body creaks and groans and he decides he'll stay here, in Hannibal's arms, on his floor, forever. It's good. Hannibal sitting on the floor with him, good. Hannibal holding him, good. Hannibal caring—

A fresh wound, splashing burns across his chest. *This is his job. He does not care. You can pretend, but don't get stupid. Keep your facts straight.* He bites his lip against whatever wants to come out, goes back to his fantasy with hitching breaths, and what was that, exactly? The fantasy of dying in his arms? Living in his bed? Wasn't that the same thing? Somewhere

Hannibal held him because he wanted to, and not because he was Doctor Lecter and it was his job.

Firm fingers turn Will's face away from Hannibal's coat, and he hates it. Would lash out if he had the energy. Instead he whines (*pathetic*), keeps his eyes closed. Something new is against his lips, and his tongue flicks out to investigate it automatically. Dried meat. Salty and full of iron. Will's stomach lurches, his veins vibrate. He doesn't want to eat, knows it will only keep him alive longer, prolong the pain, but he *needs*, viscerally, and can't help himself. He accepts the jerky, moans quietly, accidentally. His body is *so thankful* and all he can think is *Hannibal is fixing everything*.

The taste explodes on his tongue, filling his mouth with copper. He moans again, louder, forces himself to chew slowly and swallow in stages. He doesn't want to throw this up. He should, he wants to want to, but god, he's so fucking tired, and his body cherishes this gift. His mouth is so dry, from dehydration and salt and dehydrated salt, and after a few moments of uncoordinated jerks that sent lightning crashing through muscles and joints, Hannibal understands. Offers Will the water, and he hears a word, recognizable amongst the din of nothing.

"Slowly."

Will forces a nod, sips sparingly. Hannibal alternates between the jerky, water, and tea, offering each in turn, again and again, endlessly patient. Will doesn't understand why he bothers. Doesn't—maybe doesn't want to know, maybe it's all part of the job. Maybe they are friends, friends help. Maybe he's a clinician making a house call. Will starts shaking, he thinks from the sudden nourishment as much as the cold. He's becoming more and more lucid, doesn't want it. Wants to disappear forever. And take a nap.

He isn't for you. Other people get to be happy, good people. That's not for you. Leave him alone.

I could be good, Will thinks.

No you couldn't.

Oh, right. He'd forgotten. Pretending is difficult, takes a level of care he also can't summon. Planning detours. Avoiding potholes. But he's so tired, and he wants this so badly. He's going to slip, he knows. Thinks it's for the best. Drive Hannibal away for good. That's what he should be caring about. Designing his own execution.

Because now that Hannibal is here, and Will is in his arms, he knows the war is over. He will not survive another bifurcation. He cannot live through watching his deepest darkest love walk out his door. He had no lies left, no obfuscation. *He is so tired*.

He must have finished the food and drinks, because Hannibal stops offering. He's still hungry, still thirsty, but his stomach is warm and Will despises it, resents how good it feels. He's had enough to keep him alive for another period of time, he doesn't deserve more. Later, after Hannibal leaves, and maybe after he's had a nap, he'll use the calories to refill the dogs' food and water, make sure everyone is alive and accounted for.

I'm not, Will thinks, but he also isn't a dog, so he doesn't have to care.

Will wonders why Hannibal doesn't say anything. Ask any questions. He knows all about the tension of silence, and made friends with it years ago. He doesn't feel compelled to speak. He's too tired, anyway.

He wonders if he could fall asleep here, like this, in Hannibal's arms. He wants to, desperately, so desperately he feels tears threaten again, and thinks that his need alone makes sleep impossible. So does the pain, spinning out from the joints that pressed against the floor, the muscles that haven't moved in weeks. It's a dull ache Will can live with, is also friends with, except when he tries to reel himself in, become smaller, fit wholly on Hannibal's lap. Attempting to bend his knees is agony, and he moans piteously, leaves them where they are.

Just focus on him, okay? Memorize this. The pain is ever-present, unchanging and deserved, so shut up and let yourself enjoy being here. This is your only chance, it's never going to happen again. Don't let anything slip away.

He's shoved up against Hannibal's torso, the top of his head hitting his breastbone, half-sitting. His arms are where he left them when Hannibal moved him, hands in his lap, elbows digging into Hannibal's thighs. He should stop that, stop hurting the other man, but he's a rag doll and it's too hard. Raggedy Will. His feet and shins are still cold, getting colder, but his hands have stabilized at not-quite-frozen, and the rest of him, the parts against Hannibal, those are warm enough.

Hannibal's arms are at their sides, on his own legs. No longer holding him, now that he's nourished. He thinks this is Hannibal's idea of neutral, being available if Will asks, but he won't, can't. He will enjoy this, as much as he can. He will pretend, just a little, that maybe this is normal, in some parallel universe with another, better Will. He will not encourage any behavior that might lessen the pain, nor any behavior that might make it worse. He will not ask to be held, to be fed and watered, to stay here forever.

The contrast of Hannibal's heat and Will's frozen feet makes the ache worse, sharper, thrown into relief. He wonders if he has frostbite. Tells himself again that he's a pathetic needy faker lying bitch who just wants attention.

Yes, Will thinks. *I'd like some attention, please. I know it's selfish, I know I've taken up enough of his time, but just a little longer, please. Please.*

He wonders what, exactly, heard him when Hannibal answers. What divine being granted his request, what he owes as payment. He would sell his soul for this, for another five minutes close to the arms of the man he loves. Maybe he has, maybe this is his own personal hell.

Maybe not, though, because Hannibal does speak. His lips are close to Will's ear, not enough to touch—fuck no, like he deserved such a delicacy—but so Will can feel the warm currents of his breath. His voice is soft, quiet, like he knows how loud it's been, how screamingly quiet his universe has become.

“My dear Will, how can I help?”

Will is caught off guard by the question. Doesn't Hannibal know? How can he not see that he is the only help Will needs? He just needs to be held, every second of every minute of every day, for the rest of his life. It's written on his face in permanent marker, it must be, nothing has ever been so blindingly obvious.

"You could fuck me," Will croaks. He doesn't know how long it's been since he's spoken, just that the effort wasn't worth it. Why the fuck did he say that, what the fuck was wrong with him? Whatever happened to *don't push* and *don't let anything slip away*? He wants to take it back, but before he can, Hannibal answers him.

"Alright."

Will freezes. Stiffens. Hears his tendons creaking. He's going to snap. He misheard. Or misspoke, or Hannibal misspoke, or misheard. There is no universe where he says *alright*, none at all. What is *alright*, anyway, an obligation? *If you insist*? Is it guilt, pity, some bizarre moralistic law that starts with do no harm and ends with Will in pieces?

He's getting a headache. He hasn't thought this hard in days.

"Excuse me?" Will says. He coughs, clears his throat. He feels rusted.

"I'd do anything for you, Will," Hannibal says, still in that soothing lilt, like everything is okay. Nothing is okay. "You know that. If physical intimacy would improve your state of mind and body, I'm more than happy to assist."

Will knows nothing.

Will knows one thing, and it's the only thing that matters. The man behind him, saying such lovely words, is not Hannibal after all. So close, though.

"No thank you, Doctor Lecter."

He tries to get up. Gets a foot on the ground, fights through the pins and needles, tries to push himself up. His body strobes like flashing Christmas lights, each one a knife in his flesh, muscles, organs, bones. His other foot is numb, he's not sure how he managed that, one of each. He can't get it to obey him, and when the pain hits, he falls back into Hannibal's arms with a groan. The world spins around him with the force of his exertion.

Doctor Lecter's arms, that is.

Hannibal shushes him like he's a spooked gelding not yet broken. He knows it's the doctor, can't make himself remember to use the honorific in thought. He's closer now than before, his attempt a wild failure, and he's also being held again, corralled against running away, with one of Hannibal's arms wrapped firmly around his waist, anchoring them together.

"Let me go," Will says. Whispers. Any energy he'd gained from the food was lost to his escape attempt, and the realization of the doctor. He wants to die again, doesn't want to pretend anymore, it's too hard. He is so tired.

“You’ll have to pick one or the other, I’m afraid,” Hannibal says. There’s a forced lightness in his voice, like he’s trying to defuse a bomb and doesn’t want the explosive to know. Will hates it. Feels coddled, like he needs coddling. He wants to die.

“Let me go,” Will says again. He’ll go out back, he thinks. Lie down on the frozen ground. He’ll drift to sleep and won’t come back. Painless. As opposed to the spear he’d been skewered with, straight through him and into Hannibal and the floor behind him. Pinning him in agonized position. This explains why he can’t get up, he’d have to pull himself off the wooden shaft, and he doesn’t have the strength.

Hannibal hesitates. Will decides he’s weighing his ethical obligation against his desire to leave this awful place and never come back.

“Is that what you really want?”

No, Will thinks.

“Yes,” Will says. Sinks deeper onto the spear. Looks forward to being dragged off.

Hannibal sighs quietly, and Will’s insides shrivel like salted slugs. He’s disappointed him. Of course he has, he’s trash. How dare he.

“That I can’t do,” Hannibal says gently but with no regret, and no room for argument. Will would find the space. “Until I’m satisfied you are no longer a danger to yourself—”

“Fuck off,” Will says. The words hang, suspended. He waits for the guillotine drop. He’s never spoken to Hannibal like that, and especially not the preeminent Doctor Lecter. But he couldn’t hear it anymore, couldn’t hear the doctor so clearly and plainly. He doesn’t want the doctor, apparently enough to be unspeakably rude, and if there had ever been friendship between them, he’d surely ended it.

“How long has it been?” Hannibal asks.

Will sighs. “I don’t know.”

“How long?” he repeats.

“I don’t know!” Will yells, and his voice cracks and his throat burns. He manages to sit this time, leaving his legs alone, ending most of the contact. His back is screaming and his skin is screaming and his soul is screaming and he wants to sleep. “How much dog food was left?”

Another hesitation. Will wonders if he’s going to leave in the face of his behavior. He wouldn’t blame him. It would be a relief.

“Will, you opened two forty pound bags and left them on the kitchen floor. Do you not remember?”

He frowns. He thought he remembered putting down bowls. “Not specifically.”

Hands, on his upper arms. Scorching hot against the cold. Pulling him back. He resists, fails, falls. This time Hannibal wraps both arms around him, cradling him like a lover, and Will quietly gives up. This is his death. He wanted to die, and that same deity that made Hannibal first speak was also responsible for this death by a thousand platonic acts of kindness. Will hates himself for romanticizing the violence between them, one-sided, always his neck on the chopping block and never the other way around.

“Let me take care of you,” Hannibal murmurs against his ear. Will’s eyes close and he bites his lip, hard, against a whimper. “Please, let me help you.”

Will shakes his head, is unsurprised to feel tears gather. “No.”

“Why not?”

The numbness is creeping back. Will has used his allotment of emotions, isn’t allowed any more. It’s better, the numbness. He tells his body to relax, and it does, as much as it can. He tells his eyes to open and they do. He isn’t about to cry. Better, this is better.

“Will?”

Hannibal’s voice is soft, soothing. An invisible string leading Will back to where he wants him. Fine, let him. What did it matter.

“What,” he says flatly.

Don’t be rude. More emotion next time, inflection. You owe him more than nothing. You are nothing, you can never give him what he deserves, but for fuck’s sake don’t make him hate you more than he already does. You don’t exist; he does. Fucking act like it.

He tries to find the energy to apologize, but there wasn’t a direct question, and that makes answering so much harder. And he’s tired. Might be ready to drift off soon, maybe even here, in Hannibal’s arms. Just like he always wanted, his soul in exchange for a single night. It feels fair.

“Let me help you,” Hannibal says again.

Do not you fucking dare be rude to this man. Do. Not.

“Fine,” Will says. He doesn’t know what he means, if he just agreed to getting fucked or just fucked up, but acquiescing is probably not as rude as refusal, so he lets it stand.

So lightly Will thinks he might have imagined it, Hannibal presses a kiss to his neck, just below his ear. Will closes his eyes, feels it like a knife.

“Thank you, *mylimasis*.”

That’s not a word, Will thinks. *Or it is, and I really am going crazy.*

“You’re doing so well for me.” Will melts, which is interesting, since he hadn’t thought liquids could be injured. “If I help you up, do you think you can walk?”

Will shakes his head. Both feet are back to frozen blocks, numb and stabbing at once. He isn't doing well at all, wishes Hannibal wouldn't say he was, wouldn't lie to him. He should be pretending, he thinks, but the half-right words have him hoping instead, and he knows better. He isn't allowed hope. It only makes it hurt more.

Stop wanting things. What's wrong with you? You're wasting his time. Get your shit together long enough that he doesn't feel trapped by a half-baked savior complex and leaves. Then you can be as pathetic as you want. Let him go.

"I know it's going to hurt, but I promise you'll feel better soon," Hannibal says, and Will has lost track of the topic sentence, all he hears is what he's always wanted to hear. His favorite lie in his favorite voice.

Just tell me you love me and leave me alone.

"I'll be right here by your side," Hannibal says.

"You've said that before," Will murmurs, and hates himself. He's accusing Hannibal now, is he? Blaming him for failing to drown alongside him? Horrible.

"And here I am," Hannibal says, squeezes him in what must be a hug. Will doesn't think he'd recognize such a thing. When was the last time somebody hugged him, someone human and not a dog clambering over him? He can't remember. He thinks there might not be anything to remember.

This is it, he thinks. Your one allotted hug. It's okay, you can enjoy it. It's the only one you'll ever have.

He's crying again, tears slipping out when he blinks. He hates it. Doesn't care about it. Wants to die.

"Will you please try?" Hannibal asks, and seals the deal by adding, "For me."

Will sighs shakily. Yes, of course. Anything for him. Whatever he desires, whatever he directs.

"Okay."

"Good boy," Hannibal says, or at least that's what Will hears. He thinks he misheard; good job, good work, good—nothing really sounds like boy. His heart skips. That stupid fucking hope again. Hannibal shifts and Will lets himself be moved, wincing as his body protests. He doesn't think about the actions, wouldn't be able to carry them out if he did, but something in his DNA stays with Hannibal, follows even silent orders. Will is gasping in pain by the time he's on his feet, tottering on stumps he can't feel, the room gray and spinning around him. He's going to fall, but strong hands keep him up and he leans into the strong arm around his shoulders. Realizes too late he's leaning his head on Hannibal's shoulder, that the way they're standing is far too intimate. He tries to take a step away, but his legs are stiff blocks and don't listen. He wonders where they're going, and how much of it he has to be present and conscious for.

“I want to be down,” he mutters into Hannibal’s coat, the warm wool one Will loves, wishes was his, so he can wrap himself in Hannibal whenever he wants.

“I know, darling,” Hannibal croons, and Will wonders if they teach that in psych school, to use terms of endearment as a grounding technique. He hopes not.

“Just a little farther.” It’s nonsense because they haven’t moved at all, but Hannibal starts walking and Will is forced to stagger along at his side, trailing behind. He no longer cares where they’re going, the only thing he can think about is his feet, stabbing pain shooting up his legs, curling around his ass. Not pins and needles, oh no, but swords and javelins. He tries to fall, anything to take the weight off, but Hannibal doesn’t let him. “We’re almost there,” he says gently, noses Will’s hair. “You can do it, I know you can.”

Pathetic, Will says, forces his feet to move. *Baby, literally, you can’t even walk. How does he tolerate you?*

Will has no fucking clue. Another miracle, maybe.

Finally, finally, Hannibal lowers him onto a chair. Will sighs in relief, doesn’t even mind when Hannibal pulls away to—do something, Will has no idea. Isn’t even sure where they are. As the feeling of impalement fades, slowly replaced by the requisite pins and needles, and then into nothing more than cold, Will forces himself back to the present, as much as he can. Inexplicably, they’re in his bathroom, the one upstairs. He doesn’t remember stairs, must have missed them in the fog of pain. Jesus, and Hannibal was practically carrying him the whole time. Couldn’t even walk up his own fucking stairs.

Pathetic. Useless. Waste of everything.

He jumps when the water turns on, isn’t sure why. Focuses on Hannibal, who’s sitting on the edge of the tub with one hand under the faucet, the other on the tap, looking for the perfect temperature. He’s drawing Will a bath, apparently. Like any doctor would. To bring his body temperate up, yes. It makes sense.

Does it?

Go away, Will thinks.

When Hannibal is satisfied, he turns to face Will. The bathroom isn’t meant for two, and their knees knock together. Will is on the toilet, not a chair, with the lid down. Hannibal leaves his legs against Will’s; Will, who doesn’t deserve this, wants to pull away. He can’t. He’s tired again, the pain had distracted him but the exhaustion was only waiting patiently for its turn at his sanity.

“Your choice,” Hannibal says, and doesn’t give him one. “Either you can shower, which will be faster but require standing, or a bath, which is easier on your body but delays your bed. Which would you prefer?”

None of the above? Will thinks, barely understanding the question. *Why* would be better, but he’s sure Hannibal will reel off a list of medically valid lies, so why bother trying. Steam

starts to rise from the water; it makes Hannibal look otherworldly, like a faun suddenly crossed his path.

“I can’t stand,” Will says. He thinks he might be able to wobble his way to bed, leaning on the walls and scooting on his butt down the stairs, but a shower was absolutely out of the question.

“I can help, if you’d like.”

Hannibal’s face is so earnest, like there’s genuinely nothing he’d rather be doing right now than washing decades of caked-on grime and sweat from Will’s body. Will can’t see this, and he closes his eyes as he lets out a tiny exhale.

“No.” *Don’t be rude.* He opens his eyes. “No thank you.”

Hannibal nods like this was the answer he expected, turns back to the tub to secure the plug in place. “Do you need help undressing?”

“No,” Will says again, automatically. He doesn’t think this one needs a *thank you* at the end. The question was cruel, the offer lewd and facetious. Maybe not meant to be, but if the hanged man drops, does it matter who opened the trap door?

Hannibal doesn’t even hesitate when he says, “I’m still not going to leave you alone, Will.” Has the fucking *nerve* to meet Will’s eyes. “You’re fragile. I have to keep an eye on you.”

Oh god Will is going to kill him for this. For making him go through with it. He is numb; a heartbeat passes, two, and he is bleeding out; another few beats, the knife twists and twists. Then he is numb again, or wants to be enough to fake it so well he believes himself.

“Fine,” Will says. He pulls off his tank top in one agonizing movement, having forgotten the physical pain in the wealth of mental destruction. His arms crash down on his legs, the shirt balled up on the floor, but he did it. Before he can think about it, he lifts his hips and yanks off his boxers, kicking them into the corner. He curls again, wrapping his arms around himself, crossing his legs and doubling over, and that thing that twinged before, somewhere in his back, makes itself known again before slipping away. It makes Will nervous. Maybe the bath will help soothe his muscles and he’ll relax before it can take hold.

Eventually the water stops. Will glances up; Hannibal is looking at him expectantly. He looks away.

“Can you at least turn around?” Will asks the towels. “Am I that much of a risk?”

Don’t antagonize him. You know you are.

“Can you lift your arms?”

What the fuck.

“No,” Will snaps, and hey, he does have some life left in him after all. “Can you?”

“Yes,” Hannibal says patiently. “I’m here to help you, Will. In any and every capacity I can.”

Oh my god. Oh my god, he didn’t draw me a bath, he’s giving me a bath, oh Jesus fuck I can’t I can’t I can’t no please don’t stop. No. Please. Help.

Will sits silently, his mouth open just a little, staring at the towels. He can’t do this. He can’t keep his body or face or voice in check. He will immediately, irrevocably humiliate them both, forever. This is his legacy.

“Hannibal…”

“It’s nothing I haven’t done before,” he says, and Will wants to scream. “In medical school, during my residency.”

“I thought those were sponge baths,” Will states.

Hannibal’s lips curl up. “I can adapt.”

Will cannot. Already he’s noticeably hard, absolutely cannot stand up. Cannot have those eyes on him, laid bare. He thinks, maybe, he could manage once he’s in the tub, bring his knees to his chest and hold himself still. But Hannibal is between himself and the water, and Will is trapped.

“At least while I get in,” Will says. He can hear the pleading in his voice, hates it, uses it. “Please, Hannibal.”

Hannibal’s resolve softens. “Of course.” He stands, fucking *pets Will’s head* like he’s a *good little dog*>. *A good boy. And stands facing the door, away from Will, hands clasped behind his back.*

Will inhales deeply. Prepares himself. Tries to move, largely succeeds. He makes more of a splash than he’d meant, and bangs his elbow on the side of the tub, but otherwise survives.

“Will?” Quick, concerned.

“M fine, I’m alive, don’t turn around.” Will arranges himself into position as quickly as possible, knowing Hannibal won’t wait long to check on him.

That’s a nice thing to know, Will thinks.

It’s a dangerous thing to think you know, the voice advises.

“O—okay, I’m. Fine.” He is so far from fine. His reluctance is more than clear, but when he forces himself to look at Hannibal’s expression, ever neutral, assessing his needs and available products, all he sees is his doctor. He isn’t ready for the totality, without a hint of friendship or anything else. He shrivels, all of him, but he still pulls his legs closer, closer. His knees start to ache from the extreme angle.

Hannibal is efficient. He turns off the brighter of the lights, leaving a warm glow from the lights over the sink. Will sighs audibly in relief; it’s much kinder to his head than the

fluorescent overhead. The water is warm around him, and he wonders if Hannibal takes baths, if he has a whole closet devoted to bath salts and whatever else. It's a peaceful thought, lovely, and Will closes his eyes, rests his cheek on his knees. He could fall asleep like this.

He hears movement, feels when Hannibal sits next to him, on the edge of the tub. He cracks an eye open, sees that the doctor has removed his jacket and rolled up his sleeves but is otherwise fully dressed. It hurts more, because that's what doctors do, but he can live with it. The water swirls as Hannibal saturates a small hand towel, and then blessedly drags it down Will's back. The water is perfect, warm but not burning, how he usually likes it. It would be too much now, for his frozen feet aching in the gentle warmth and his overstimulated existence. He hums quietly, lets his eyes close again.

Will has no memories of bathing with another person. He supposes his dad must've given him baths when he was a baby, but without pictures or a mom to confirm, he doesn't know. He's never enjoyed showering with a partner; too many limbs, not enough heat. There is nothing tender or gentle in high school locker rooms, and anyway, his dad stalls.

He feels so, so vulnerable. Open and defenseless. Part of it is being naked, he's sure, but it's more than that. Hannibal is washing his back in slow circles, no hurry or rush, and when Will peeks at his expression, he seems...content. At rest in a way Will isn't sure he's seen from Hannibal before. Of the two of them Will was undoubtedly the unstable, neurotic one, but even so. Hannibal doesn't do still. Even when he isn't moving, he's always at the ready, like a predator waiting patiently for the right prey. There's an anticipation, about him, that denies rest.

Or, there had been. Has always been.

Now, doing nothing more than soaping Will's back and rinsing him off, he looks at peace. Like this is all he's ever wanted. Like this is what he's been waiting for.

Will stopped breathing a while ago, and that's okay. He doesn't need air to watch, needs only to stay exactly how he is. Hannibal catches his eyes, and Will doesn't turn away. Too difficult to move his head, but he doesn't close his eyes, either. He wants to see this Hannibal, it has to be Hannibal now, has to. He can't read anything in his eyes, he's too tired, confused, only able to see worst case scenarios—except for Hannibal's smile, small and pleased. Then he goes back to washing him, and Will has to close his eyes again. Pleased, Hannibal is pleased, he will do anything to keep him pleased, if that smile is his reward. He will also start crying again if he focuses too much on the present, lets it be too real. This is a one-time deviation, he reminds himself, because he is in crisis.

But he can pretend, for a little longer.

you say we share a brain, apologizing for it, but i take it as a compliment, you make me really nervous

Chapter Summary

Will accepts Hannibal's help, eventually.

3

The washcloth comes over his shoulder, down his arm. Will tenses, draws his elbows further into his ribs. He's adjusted, mostly, is probably soft enough that Hannibal wouldn't notice, but then he'd be thinking about it, telling himself not to, and if there was one thing that guaranteed an erection, it was trying not to have one.

Also, Hannibal. In general.

Will turns his face against his knees, clenches his jaw, lets Hannibal take his right arm, thighs so tightly pressed to his chest he's making the pain worse again, but that's okay. He deserves it, keeps it in the forefront of his mind. He might be able to pretend, yes, that this was normal, that Hannibal always touched him like this, but he wouldn't let himself get carried away. There was no after this, only this. No next time. Will manages his expectations and wonders briefly why the water hasn't turned red with his blood, given all the stab wounds.

Gently, Hannibal sets his arm back in the water, and Will wraps himself in himself. The pressure is good, he likes pressure. The lack of Hannibal is very, very bad, and he realizes belatedly that he is crying again, not much but steady, leaking silently down his face to join the bath water. Hannibal must see, but he doesn't comment.

"Can you turn for me, Will?"

Phrased any other way, no, he absolutely cannot. But it's Hannibal, and he said *for me* and he said *Will* and his words were like cotton candy, ephemeral, melting in Will's mouth. He groans quietly, gathers his reserves, and with no grace whatsoever and enough splashing to rival the dogs, he scoots around so he's facing the back wall of the shower, away from the tap. He keeps his head the same way, now looking at the tiles and watching them double, triple, as his vision deconstructs. It feels more real than the cloth on his skin, looks more familiar than this strange, settled Hannibal, who may or may not be his doctor.

Fuck, he's tired. Starts to drift off. Is given his arm back much too quickly.

"You're doing so well," Hannibal says again, and Will wants to tell him he's wrong, doesn't have the energy. "I need you to face me now."

Will shakes his head. Is so, so glad he's facing the tile wall as it quadruples behind his tears. He doesn't want to be seen, but it's more than that. He doesn't think he could survive such intimacy. Doesn't think there's a way back, for him, from there. He knows he likely won't last long once Hannibal leaves, even if this interlude pushes back his progress. He'll waste away or freeze to death eventually, but he doesn't want to make a fool of himself, doesn't want to beg. And he will, if Hannibal pushes enough, and sob, and flagellate himself in penance at his feet. He wants that last crumb of dignity, the one that keeps trying to get away from him. It's his, and he will not give it to Hannibal willingly, he'll have to pry it from his cold, dead hands.

"Please, Will."

He groans again, this time in pained bliss. How long he's wanted, waited to hear those words. He's moving before he realizes, not towards Hannibal but with his back to him, sitting sideways in the tub. Hannibal gives him time, doesn't argue, and slowly Will uncurls. The sounds of his joints popping echo around them, amplified by the tile. His back twinges as he straightens, but doesn't seem ready to give in. His knees are especially bad and he doesn't try to unfold them, just leans back, against the edge of the tub, legs still bent and largely covering himself.

He prays this is good enough. That maybe he'll get that smile again, even if he can't see it. He wants to let himself believe that this is easier, because Hannibal can't see his face, but the thought scares him. He might need the constant pressure of being caught to school his expression into dazed neutrality. Like this, he almost feels capable of smiling himself. Maybe even wanting to stay alive, if it means more of this.

It doesn't, the voice reminds Will flatly. *You know it won't.*

He does know. He does. But he'd like to forget a moment longer.

He's not sure what he expects, in this position, but it definitely isn't Hannibal pressing up against him, burying his face in his hair, breathing deeply. Will is shocked into stillness, eyes closed, breathing fast and light. Dizzy, from the steam and Hannibal's arms around him, and the washcloth resumes its gentle path, only now Will is flushed, and his breath hitches when it passes over first one nipple and then the other.

"Y-your shirt," Will gasps, because he has to say something, has to make an effort to stay present, or he really will drive Hannibal away forever. Shove a penis-shaped wedge between them. "Wet."

Hannibal kisses him again, the side of his face, where his ear and cheekbone meet. Will can't breathe, but the rise and fall of Hannibal's chest against his back is deep and regular. Of course it is, why would he be affected by this, what is Will thinking. He has to stop this, now.

"It will dry," Hannibal murmurs, and Will feels his breath, hot and humid. He whimpers pitifully. Thinks again that this needs to stop. Instead Hannibal dips lower, washing his stomach, lower abdomen. Will trembles, but the washcloth never goes past his hipbones. He wants to die. Wants to stay here forever, immortalized in this moment. Will thinks he might linger, spending longer than he needs to, going over Will's torso with slow, steady motions,

again and again. Will lets his head fall back onto Hannibal's shoulder, and Hannibal fucking *licks his tears away*, even when more spill at the tenderness he will never have.

"Stop," Will whispers.

The washcloth leaves, Will thinks he hears it land on the floor. Hannibal stays, his face pressed into Will's, both arms looped around him, holding him up and in place. "It's okay, Will." He can feel his words before they're spoken, rumbling up from his diaphragm and along Will's spine. Nothing is okay, but this is perfect. "I want you to feel good. Let me help you."

Will has no idea what he's talking about. Hannibal's lips move against his skin when he talks, mouthing patterns into his skin, permanent brands. He will never be able to look at himself in the mirror again without seeing Hannibal. Without remembering this.

This isn't real, he thinks. You don't deserve this. You're misunderstanding. You're pushing. You're obvious and disgusting and this is not yours.

He knows. He knows, he knows, he knows. The knife is back, buried to the hilt in his chest, and when Will forces his eyes open to see how it disappears into his soft and unprotected flesh, he sees. Understands what Hannibal meant. He's hard again, nothing to hide his traitor's reaction, arcing up so his head is exposed to cool air, and he twitches at the image, at Hannibal's musk mixing with his own, at such loving contact while—

He's a doctor. It's not love. It's treatment. It's nothing, just like you.

Will closes his eyes on a pitiful groan. He doesn't know how Hannibal takes it, can't see if he understands that it comes from misery and not arousal. Yes, of course, he is aroused. Isn't this what he'd first asked for? To get fucked? He can let it happen, he realizes fully, for the first time. If he wants it, Hannibal will give it to him. He offered, he sounded genuine, his actions align with his words.

Not with yours.

He squirms at the pain spiraling through him. Hannibal just holds him, doesn't seem to infer anything at all. He can't let it happen, not like this. He's so tired, he doesn't know if he can stop. He should never have allowed things to get this far.

"Go home," Will says, hears how he already sounds defeated.

"I—"

"Can't do that, I know." Will sits up, pulls himself free of the other man. Brings his legs back up to his chest, not that it matters. He wipes a hand over his face, is reminded that he was, is crying, isn't sure what tense to use. He wants to be alone. He wants to fuck his own hand, come with Hannibal's name on his lips and a fresh torrent of tears soaking into his pillow, and then he wants to die. "Just. Don't touch me." He isn't sure why he's making it worse, maybe because he deserves it. Has never done a single thing in his entire life to warrant

Hannibal's warmth and safety. He cannot accept such a gift, this he knows with certainty. "Close your eyes, I want to get out."

Hannibal hesitates. Of course he does. It draws out Will's agony, why wouldn't he twist the knife deeper? Bruise and break his ribs with the hilt?

This is better, Will thinks numbly.

"Will, I've—"

"And stop saying my name," he snaps. Immediately regrets it, feels the hurt radiating out at him, doesn't allow himself the redemption of an apology. He doesn't say anything, and it occurs to him that the water is starting to get cold and if he stays, he'll likely be dead by—by sooner. He has no idea, still, of the time, but after Hannibal leaves and he's blessedly alone, he can open the window, and it shouldn't take long after that. It's a good death, hypothermia. Better than he deserves.

He doesn't know how long it's been when Hannibal speaks, either.

"Why?"

Will groans, lets his head drop back to his knees, which are getting cold. Good. "You know why."

Another pause, shorter. "I assure you, I don't."

"Then figure it out," he snaps again. Maybe it'll drive him away finally. "You're so fucking brilliant, do the math." He hates himself for this, but what's one more reason when there are already so many to choose from.

"W—" Hannibal stutters on his name, keeps it behind his lips, barely. Sick, twisted pleasure courses through Will at having made the other man so unsure. "A-agent Graham, I don't—"

Will laughs, hollow and empty. He didn't know he was still capable of laughter, however bitter. He's naked in his bathtub, water going cold yet still his dick is hard as a fucking rock, Hannibal fucking *washed* him like he was Jesus and Hannibal Mary Magdalene, and now he was calling him Agent Graham.

It makes perfect sense. He is Doctor Lecter and you are Agent Graham. That's all it's ever been.

Fuck, the voice is right, startling in its acuity, given that Will has none. "Forget it," he chokes out. "Call me whatever you want."

He hears Hannibal sigh, the irritation in it. Good. The first step towards leaving.

"Will, tell me what's happening. Now. I'm no longer asking."

He freezes, chokes on the air in his lungs, can't find room for more. His diaphragm is no longer available, it has snapped under the pressure of his own self-loathing. He really will

die, right here, right now.

“Will.”

He thinks Hannibal will keep saying his name, over and over, to spite him. He almost wants to let him. Every syllable falls like a kick to his solar plexus, knocking whatever air was left out of him.

“I’m dying,” Will says, because he has to, he has to say something, he knows this. Or Hannibal will stay forever.

“No.”

Will laughs again. “No? How would you know?”

“Because, since I arrived, I have taken your temperature, listened to your lungs, measured your heartbeat, as well as given you food and water, which you kept down. I’ve raised your core temperature several degrees. I would know, and I wouldn’t allow it.”

Great, he thinks numbly. Can’t argue with that logic.

That’s all he was doing, you know. Checking your vitals. Anything else was incidental.

Will knows. He tells himself it doesn’t matter, and in the grand scheme of things, it probably doesn’t. “Then I don’t know,” he says dully. “I’m not trying to be difficult, I just. Don’t know what you want me to say.”

“You’re shaking,” Hannibal says, and Will realizes it’s true. From the cold, the pity, the suffocation, the drowning, the knife still lodged in him. “If I hand you a towel, will you get out and dry yourself, or are you going to stay in the water with your soaking cape and pretend that’s what I meant?”

He said pretend.

He said you’re throwing a tantrum and he’s sick of it. You want him to go, let him coddle you until he’s satisfied, and then you can do whatever you want. Keep going like this, he’ll have you committed.

But he said pretend.

So fucking what.

“Will you be watching me?” he asks, knowing the answer.

“Yes.”

Will nods to himself, imperceptible against his knees. “Then I guess I don’t have a choice.”

“You can choose to fight me,” Hannibal allows. “But you won’t win.”

Undeniably true, he thinks they've gotten away from the point, how tired he is. He's not sure if he *can* stand on his own, he definitely can't win in hand-to-hand combat.

"Fine," he says again. "Whatever you want, Doctor."

He doesn't know why he added the title. He does, because it burns at him, dissolving everything it touches. He had been nothing before Hannibal arrived, has presently become confused about his existence, and this is as good a solution as any. Corrode whatever's left until he's nothing again.

He hears Hannibal move. Stand. Lean over to pull the drain, into Will's space, where he can feel his heat. Straighten. Take the towel off the bar.

"Up. Now."

Will tries to obey. He wants to, even now, hates himself so goddamn much for it. Codependency at its finest, only it's not co- anything if it's only him. He opens his eyes, tries to get his feet under himself, find some purchase against the wet porcelain. The water drains in eddies next to him, he wants to drain with it. He tries again, bracing himself on the edges of the tub, but as soon as he puts weight on his feet, his knees shriek in protest and the twinge, it's in his lower back, on the left, he feels it very clearly now. He winces, falls back, lands on his ass and groans in pain and humiliation.

"Help me," he says. There's nothing in his voice. Numb little vocal cords.

"Prolonged immobility can cause muscle and joint stiffness," Hannibal says, like that wasn't the point. He was, is, tired, yes. He also deserves the pain and denied himself relief, will continue with that once Hannibal is gone. "Do you have feeling in your extremities?" Will nods. "Good, then you can stand." He isn't at all sure that follows, but Hannibal again loops his arms around Will, hauling him to his feet by his armpits, unrelenting even when Will screams in pain, tries to collapse, bend over, anything to reduce the pressure on his joints and the jackhammer drilling into his back.

"My goal is not to torture you," Hannibal says, propping Will up against the wall, drying him. Will pants harshly, eyes closed, mouth twisted in a snarl. He finally understands why Hannibal wanted to know how long he'd been on the floor; it wasn't to gauge his mental health, he was making sure he wasn't dead. "I'm trying to help you, which I can't do when you fight me."

Will wants to say he isn't fighting anymore. Wants to ask for help to get to a bed as soon as possible. Wants whatever drugs Hannibal has on his person. He wants to nap, and then he wants to get back in the bath and open the window. But even that is secondary to *down down put me down it hurts please put me down*.

On the bright side, he's no longer erect.

Hannibal towels him off quickly and efficiently, regards Will from where he's kneeling on the bathroom floor, looking up at him. Will closes his eyes again, isn't sure when he'd opened them, but has no interest in seeing Hannibal like that. Not now.

“I’m taking you to the guest room,” he says eventually. “Across the hall. I don’t want you on the stairs, and I don’t want you on that cot in your living room. This is nonnegotiable.” But he pauses anyway, waits for Will to say something.

“Fine.” He’d forgotten about the guest room. Never uses it. He only comes upstairs to use the bathroom, and to climb out onto his roof now and again. He likes his cot, kind of. Tolerates it so he can be with the dogs, not all of whom can navigate a full flight of stairs.

“Then we can talk.”

Will wants to groan, to deny him, but he wants to be down, too. In a bed. He’s so tired.

“Fine.”

“Alright.”

Will shudders, wonders if Hannibal has any idea that he’s ruined the word, forever tainted it with his acquiescence. It seems like something he’d do, use it against Will like that. He doesn’t have the desire or time to ask before Hannibal wraps an arm firmly around his waist, taking most of his weight, and starts walking. The shuffling steps are agony, Will hadn’t remembered the guest room being several miles from the bathroom, but hey, he hasn’t had a reason to think about it in years. His legs do loosen a little, by the time they cross the threshold, but whatever’s wrong with his back is getting worse. He bites the inside of his cheek, hard, and when Hannibal lowers him onto the foot of the bed, he immediately lies back, lessening the pressure.

He expects Hannibal to say something, and the silence is enough to make Will curious. He’d been so demanding, ordering him around, and now it was time to talk, so why wasn’t he talking?

Will pushes himself up onto his elbows—won’t be able to manage for long, but at least enough to see his face—and frowns. He doesn’t recognize Hannibal’s expression. Surprise is part of it, and he notes how Hannibal isn’t breathing, his every atom still. His shirt is wet, Will had warned him about that, but he hadn’t fully appreciated the situation, before. He’s wearing a white button-down, and while Will always assumed he wore this over an undershirt, that was evidently not the case. His shirt was largely see-through, clinging to him, and fuck.

Fuck, that’s all.

It’s then that he remembers he himself is actually naked, and a few more pieces fall into place. He must look—look something, lying half-off the bed, looking up at Hannibal with heavy-lidded eyes and his mouth half open.

Shut up, the voice says. You’re seeing what you want to see because you’re too pathetic to allow yourself the reality—surprise, yes, and disgust, and pity, and annoyance edging into anger, and regret that he checked on you and got himself tangled in your disaster. He’ll lose his license if he leaves and you kill yourself. Maybe that’s what he’s seeing.

Will collapses back, eyes squeezed shut, hands balled into fists at his side. He'd known Hannibal felt obligated, that he was a doctor first and foremost, but the full implications had wandered past. Whether or not he'd feel guilty or responsible is irrelevant; Will's death would ruin his life, permanently. He was so tired, he couldn't think of a clear way to die that would be read as accident and not suicide, so clear that it could never be traced back to Hannibal.

He needs to sleep. Then he can plan.

But with the realization came the familiar numbing heaviness, and the futility of the whole exercise. It doesn't matter, nothing matters. Hannibal will never be blamed, Will has never been stable. He kept him going as long as he could, and Will couldn't take it anymore. He wouldn't be surprised if Hannibal gets a medal for keeping him up and running for so long. He deserves it.

Just go, Will thinks dully. Please. You've done enough, just go.

He'd had a plan, for getting rid of Hannibal. Grabs at what remains of his feeble mind.

"Talk," Will says, and in the pause he definitely hears surprise, absolutely. It's fair, he's been doing everything in his power to stay quiet, but that hasn't been working, Hannibal is still here. He can change tactics if he wants. "You wanted to talk, talk."

"Actually, I wanted you to talk," Hannibal says, and Will sighs. He should have known.

"What do you want me to say?" he asks. Tries to inject some emotion, any emotion, to make himself sound more convincing. Fails.

The bed settles above him and to his left. Hannibal must have sat down. He wants him to say a lot, then. He sighs quietly; fine. If that's what it takes.

"I'm worried about you," Hannibal says plainly, and Will waits. There doesn't seem to be more.

"I can't speak to that," Will says, and he's pleased with how eloquent he sounds. Put together, like somebody who isn't a danger to themselves or others. "I'm not."

"You're not worried about yourself?" Hannibal asks. Will can hear the psychiatrist in his voice, loathes it. *Tell me more*, it says. *How does that make you feel?*

"No," Will answers honestly. He isn't anything about himself. Will soon cease to be a self. He has to bite back a nearly hysterical laugh as he says, "There's nothing to worry about."

Hannibal, it seems, is also changing tactics. He asks, "What hurts the most, right now?" It's a variation on ordering him out of the bathtub; he's withdrawn his gentle, open-ended questions and is demanding specifics.

Will's cock twitches. He isn't surprised. He almost doesn't care. So close, and yet the knife. "My back," he says, which isn't untrue. Of his actual physical ailments, his back is by far the worst. "I don't know what happened, I was just lying there."

“For how long?”

He sighs. “You can ask me however many times you want, I still don’t know.”

He must sound defeated enough that Hannibal believes him. “Do you know what day it is now?”

“No,” Will says. He hasn’t opened his eyes, hasn’t made any attempt to move or cover himself. He’s so tired. He wants Hannibal to tuck him in and if he can’t have that, then he might as well stay where he is.

“What’s the last day you remember?”

Will sighs. He thinks, which he doesn’t want to do. He did try to remember before, but he’s fully committed to making Hannibal believe that he’s okay enough to recover on his own, so he tries harder. “Monday. I almost didn’t bother going in, the weekend was so much easier. But I did.”

“How did you get home?” Hannibal’s voice is gentle again, and Will hates that even more than purely-a-doctor. He may be allowing himself the luxury of pretending, briefly, from time to time, but when Hannibal feeds into it, it becomes so much harder to separate reality from fantasy.

“I drove,” he says. “Presumably. I was alone in the car in the driver’s seat at Quantico, and then in my driveway.”

The bed shifts again. Hannibal is inching closer. Will wishes he wouldn’t.

“What did you have for dinner?”

Jesus, he wasn’t grilled like this when he had encephalitis, what was so much worse about now? He remembers giving the dogs food—normal amounts, in bowls. The refrigerator had been empty. He opened a drawer, looking for a takeout menu. The drawer had been empty, and Will remembers thinking, *huh, just like me*. After that, he doesn’t know.

“I don’t think I ate,” he says. “There are flashes, since then. I know I’ve been taking care of the dogs, they come first.” He hadn’t meant to let that slip, but who cares. He does want to give the impression of caring, though, and so he asks, “What’s today?”

Hannibal seems to be deciding if Will is stable enough to hear the answer. Eventually he says, “Thursday evening.”

“Oh.” It’s been a while, then. He wonders if he did hurt his back at some point and forgot. He hadn’t been on the floor for three days, not continuously, he was certain. Aside from the dogs—because who knows when he gave them all the food in the house—his boxers weren’t soiled, so he’d been using the bathroom regularly. He tries to remember when he became aware of being on the floor, but there were no time cues other than daylight. In all likelihood he hadn’t been there overnight, because he would have been significantly colder. The fireplace hadn’t been lit; maybe he’d been on his way to do that, found it took too much

effort. Or he could have built a fire, then laid down and watch it burn out. “Not longer than sometime last night,” he says at last. “I think.”

“When you lay down?” Will nods. “You have no other memories from the past four days?”

“Dog food,” he says automatically. “Going to the bathroom.” Not as often as he must have, though. “I had water, and I think some stale crackers? I don’t know when.” He tries harder, rubs a fist against his forehead like he can draw the memories out. “I don’t know, Hannibal. The only thing I’m sure about is taking care of the dogs, and I’m pretty sure I didn’t soil myself. That’s it.”

He hears the smile in Hannibal’s voice as he says, “No, you did not.” Another sigh, maybe an attempt to disguise his movements, as if Will can’t feel everything beneath him. He’s almost close enough to touch, he’s pretty sure. Isn’t going to reach out to see. “I should have come earlier. I’m so sorry.”

Will opens his eyes, stares at the ceiling in surprise. “What?”

“I knew you haven’t been doing well, and I let you skip our session.” He sighs again, and he sounds so sad, almost as sad as Will. “I should have met you at the scene, and made sure you got home safely.”

“But I did,” Will says, frowning. “I was fine.” Was he, though? “Home, at least, I was home all weekend, and I did go in on Monday, you can ask Jack.”

“I believe you,” Hannibal says soothingly. “But you stopped returning my texts Saturday afternoon, and didn’t answer your phone. The battery died Sunday morning, although I didn’t discount the idea that you turned it off intentionally.”

Will had honestly forgotten he owned a phone. He has no idea where it is, no memory of it at all. “I’m sorry,” he says, still confused, so many steps behind. Did he ever think he could keep up with Hannibal Lecter? How dare he.

“Don’t be,” Hannibal says, again so genuine Will is forced to believe him. “Jack called me on Tuesday to ask if I heard from you, and I told him no. I asked if I should be worried, and he said not to bother, that you sometimes vanish for several days at a time.” His tone shifts and Will is captivated. “I reminded him the last time that happened you were dying. I don’t remember what was said after that.” He clearly does, but Will lets it go. Knowing he fought for him is enough, so much more than enough. “He agreed to send Alana by to make sure you were okay. I trusted him.”

Will finally looks at Hannibal, who doesn’t notice. He’s staring off into the mid-distance, eyes unfocused, lost in the story. Will can’t breathe, again. It’s getting old. Hannibal isn’t.

“Alana texted me that night and said she dropped in and you were home,” Hannibal continues. His voice is far away, too. And furious. Quietly, tamped down, well-disguised, but there. “I didn’t hear from you yesterday, but I told myself Alana was to be trusted. That she cares for you, and wouldn’t have left if you weren’t safe. I don’t know if Jack didn’t convey the severity of the situation or if she failed to notice, but I found out this afternoon that she

hadn't dropped in at all. Barely stopped by. She said she drove by your home, saw your car was there and your lights were on, didn't hear any sounds of distress from you or your dogs, and left."

Will is fascinated by all of this, from the reality of the week to Hannibal's reactions. He has no memory of seeing a car stopped in front of his house, but he also has no memory of where he was or what he was doing. Even if he had, it might not have registered, especially if the dogs hadn't barked. He can't find the words to say how glad he is that it was Hannibal who found him and not Alana, and so he doesn't try.

"Found out?" he asks instead. Hannibal's eyes focus, jerk to his. "Jack called you, he called Alana, Alana texted you. But yesterday you found out. How?"

Hannibal smiles distractedly, and Will realizes that's the most sense he's made in days. Maybe weeks, it feels like years. He used full sentences, coherent logic, had a clear topic sentence, at least once he'd explained it. He's mildly alarmed by this, it doesn't feel like something a dying person could do, but he wants to know.

"I called Jack, he informed me that you still hadn't come to work. Then I called Alana to ask how, exactly, you were acting, and she said she didn't know. So yes, I found out that you needed me, and I came."

"You," Will says, immediately regrets it. Hannibal looks confused, so he obfuscates. "You came, thank you." This isn't what he means, and he hasn't at all decided that he's thankful for the intervention, but it's better than asking if Hannibal knew why Will needed him, specifically. If that's what he'd been saying, the word slipped out before he could stop himself.

Hannibal looks away, says again, "I should have come sooner."

Will doesn't know what to say, still. He doesn't know how he feels, only that he does and he isn't supposed to. He is dead and nothing and pathetic, he could only register pain and taint any pleasure, he isn't. He is not. Except that he is, he's something, and while death still sounds like the simplest solution, he thinks *soon* and not *immediately now as soon as possible*.

He's cold again. He thinks, *I should get under the blankets before Hannibal notices and blames himself*. He thinks, *I should at least put on clothing. Definitely shouldn't be naked*. He doesn't do either of those things.

He is tired. He is in pain. Mostly, he is rooted to the spot.

"I'm sorry," he says again. Looks away, cheeks red. He's supposed to be friends with the silence, immune to the call to break it. He was, just a minute ago. And still, when Hannibal says nothing, he keeps talking. "For worrying you, making you come out here. I'm okay now, I promise. You can go."

More silence. Will is exhausted by his words and his lies, thinks moodily that Hannibal can have this one, it's his turn.

“I don’t want to do that,” he says eventually, and it’s a conscious effort to keep breathing. It’s an inelegant sentence, that’s what tries to steal Will’s air. Awkward. He sees on Hannibal’s face that he knows, he’s heard it too, and he’s embarrassed. Will is in awe as Hannibal gathers himself. “While I’m glad you’re feeling better, I want to keep you under observation until I’m satisfied you are, in fact, okay.”

“A seventy-two hour hold,” Will says, still not breathing. He’s getting dizzy. Hannibal wants to stay with him for the length of a psychiatric hold instead of dropping him off at Chilton’s doorstep. Hannibal wants him, a little bit. To be around him. Even if it’s to keep an eye on him.

He has to go, Will thinks firmly. You can’t do this, you absolutely cannot, you will ruin everything, he is so kind and good to you, I swear to god and the devil, get him out. You are a pathetic little shithead and he must leave.

“Until I’m satisfied,” Hannibal says evasively, and twists the knife. If Will has to make him leave, the least he can do is not say things like that. “You need to eat, a real meal, more than char’qui.” Will doesn’t recognize the word, assumes it’s whatever Hannibal fed him earlier. “And you need to sleep.”

“Are you going to watch me do that, too?” Will asks, and his hands are on the knife, stabbing himself over and over again. Nobody else has touched it, only his fingerprints to show. It’s been him all along.

“Yes.” His response is terribly, cruelly clinical. “Once you are well-fed and well-rested, then we can see.”

Great, locked in a room with Doctor Lecter. That sounds like something Will can survive. Fake his way through. *Pretend.*

Just a little stronger for just a little longer.

“I don’t have any food,” he says. He doesn’t know why; Hannibal always seems to have a five course meal ready at the drop of a hat, pulled from thin air.

“I brought ingredients,” Hannibal says, and Will pushes the knife deeper. “Along with other provisions.” He doesn’t elaborate, and Will forces himself silent until he can move on.

“So cook,” he says eventually. “Go, make dinner. I’m so tired, I just want to sleep.”

“I said I’m not leaving you alone,” Hannibal says sharply.

Will narrows his eyes. He is *so goddamn tired*, there is nothing he wants more in this world than to sleep. He can’t drag himself all the way downstairs and back up, and the way Hannibal is acting, his bed—*cot*—is out of the question. He wants to be angry, let it flare out, burn Hannibal until he’s forced to leave and seek treatment. He wants to feel nothing again, is evidently incapable of doing so when Hannibal is in the room, and so he has to leave. Before Will destroys him.

“Go cook,” he says, and there must be something in his eyes or his tone, because Hannibal hears him. Listens.

“Where is your phone?”

“Unavailable,” Will says, so he doesn’t have to admit he doesn’t know. He needs to sound sane, needs to be left alone. “What if I pinkie promise not to kill myself? Will that do the trick?”

Hannibal looks like he’s been slapped, and shame floods through Will. He wants to take it back, but. He wants to sleep.

“Please, can I sleep?” he asks, and he meant it to sound sarcastic, another hammer strike driving the nail home, but he just sounds broken. Exhausted. Like he’s begging. He hadn’t wanted to beg, he remembers that. Doesn’t care anymore. “Please, Hannibal. I’m so tired. Please just let me sleep.”

Hannibal softens. He reaches out, runs a hand through Will’s hair, stroking down his cheek. He sighs, lets his eyes close. “As long as you’re under the blankets, so I know you aren’t freezing.”

That, Will thinks, *is very unfair*. It’s unfair that Hannibal noticed, although not surprising. It’s unfair that he’s demanding Will take care of himself. It’s unfair that he already knew this is what he wanted, and now Hannibal is giving it to him. It’s unfair that Hannibal doesn’t seem to see a distinction between friend and doctor, or if he does, that he doesn’t mind switching between the two as it suits him.

The pain, however, is very fair. Every ache and twinge, every time he moves. So he guesses he does deserve to get under the blankets, since moving is bound to tear him apart.

“Fine,” he says, and this time it is, or close enough.

Will sits up.

The twinge in his back is no longer a twinge. It is a knotted, thorny mass of granite, attached to every nerve in his body, electrocuting his brain. He thinks he might scream, thinks he’s grabbing at his back, clawing at it. Thinks Hannibal is there, and Will is scaring him. Will is scaring himself. He has been shot, stabbed, beaten up, choked out, broken bones, set his brain on fire to see what’d happen, and this. This is worse.

He is flipped, on his stomach now. He doesn’t think he did it himself, although maybe, in his thrashing. He’s crying again but fuck that, he does deserve these tears, he has been shot with a molted cannonball, he is on fire, he is dying.

This is what you wanted, the voice reminds him.

Will wants to tell it to fuck off, can’t. Can’t anything.

And then.

He tries to scream again, can only manage a punched out wretched groan as his back stabbed, over and over again. Sandpaper like chainsaws on his skin, attempting to dig into his back, works past the solid resistance of the spasming muscles, and Will was wrong, *this* is the worst. Especially because a tiny, microscopic portion of his brain is whispering that Hannibal is doing this, Hannibal is causing his body to tear open like a fucking volcano, Hannibal is the engine of his demise, Hannibal—

The knot lets go.

Will moans again, breathless and gasping, trying to remember how to be alive. Hannibal's fingers are still buried in the small of his back, working the rest of the pain away. *He is so skilled*, Will thinks, and otherwise does nothing, is incapable of movement. Hannibal's hands are so hot, melting any lingering tension. Will's breathing is nearly back to normal, and while he's still clammy, he's no longer pouring sweat. He is down, on the bed, and only in moderate pain instead of unbearable. He wonders if death is this painful, if he's wrong about hypothermia. Nobody really knows what it's like at the end, and corpses don't talk. Most of the time.

"Better?" Hannibal asks gently. His hands are still moving, stroking lightly. Offering more, maybe.

Stop pretending. It's too late for that.

"Yeah," Will says, sounding as dazed as he feels. As clarity returns, so does fear, that every other cramp will turn into this, every twinge is a warning sign, the only question is when. "Do you have any muscle relaxants, in your provisions?"

"I do, but I think this will be more effective," he says, and in a flurry of movement Will doesn't understand he's moved so he's fully on the bed, legs included, and on the right, facing the window. That was nice, even if it's too dark to see anything.

Will is tired. He doesn't protest as Hannibal's hands return, finding every injured muscle, every sore joint. He *should* protest, this is far too much for him, he deserves none of this, but it's so good. So relaxing. So easy to pretend he's held and loved. He closes his eyes and hopes to fall asleep like this, just once, just so he can know.

No. You don't deserve it.

Will knows, but before he can argue, Hannibal's voice washes over him like a sea of clouds.

"Relax," he says, and his words are hypnotic. He must have felt Will tense before he'd been aware, and god, he *did not deserve this*. "Will? Am I hurting you?"

He forces himself to breathe. To stop pretending. He might have given himself permission before, but things have changed. Hannibal isn't leaving, or stopping. Will needs to reel himself in. He needs to have done that a while ago, but.

"No," he says quietly. *Yes*.

“Do you want me to stop?”

Will considers. He resents having to think. Pretending is easier. “Not yet.” Hannibal doesn’t stop, but Will can tell from his touch that he’s said the wrong thing. “No, I mean.”

“You’re not very convincing.”

Will knows. He doesn’t even believe himself. Which is funny, because it’s true, he doesn’t want Hannibal to stop, ever. Nobody in their right mind would want this to stop.

He thinks about the first thing he said to Hannibal today, to distract himself. He’s been largely successful at not destroying himself with it, it’s possible in a subconscious desire to save it for later, sharpen the blade before the guillotine swings. He wonders if Hannibal meant it. If he meant *alright*, meant *I’d do anything for you*. He might have, he’s certainly done a lot today. More than Will ever would have expected under any circumstances, let alone when he is the human embodiment of stepping in a pile of dog shit. Hannibal doesn’t seem to have a problem with physical intimacy. He might. Might.

It won’t mean what you want it to mean. This is so dangerous. Please, please don’t do this. Not unless you’re serious about suicide. You know you can’t survive platonic physical intimacy with him. If you do this, you better have a plan. You can’t do this. You can’t.

“Talk to me.”

It’s not quite a demand, not like *up, now* or *until I’m satisfied*, but he hears the iron in his voice and doesn’t have the energy to fight.

“I’m thinking about your offer,” he says. He doesn’t know why. Maybe he is suicidal.

Hannibal’s hands lose their hesitancy, return to carefully removing every ounce of tension in his body. It’s almost fun, Will thinks, placing bets on whether Hannibal can soothe the worry from his muscles before Will can replace it.

“Which offer?” he asks. His tone sounds light and like lies.

“About fucking me.”

“Ah.” There’s no break in rhythm, no hint that he might have any interest, one way or the other. “Have you changed your mind?”

“I don’t know.” He does, the answer is no, he never should have said it in the first place, he absolutely should not have brought it up again. With Hannibal’s hands on his naked body, making him feel so much better. He says, “Maybe.”

How are you going to do it, Will? Make a real effort at hypothermia? Walk off the roof? It’s not high enough. Use your gun? The ease at which the options come scares him. Then you probably don’t really want to die after all. You’re just throwing a tantrum to get attention. I told you so. And now I’m telling you not to sleep with your psychiatrist-slash-only friend-slash-secret love. And about that: do you really think it’s still a secret? After asking, after the bath, after now? Do you truly believe there’s any part of him that doesn’t know?

Then why did he offer? he asks himself desperately, finds he doesn't have anything new to say. *Why is he still here?*

"I'm at your disposal," Hannibal says, and Will wants to die. Considers being honest about it. About everything. Isn't that what Hannibal wants from him, an all-access path to his psychopathy? Might as well, he'll be dead soon.

"Please don't say that," he says calmly as he watches himself float away from his body. *Will has left the building.* "Not unless you mean it."

"Of course I mean it," Hannibal says, and he sounds mildly offended, that Will doesn't believe him.

He sighs. "Not like that."

Hannibal stops. His hands withdraw. Will is ready for his death now. He no longer cares how.

"I'm confused."

Oh, sure. Hannibal is the one confused, Will needs to elaborate. That's fair.

"Not as my doctor," he says, and at least his voice sounds dead, there's that. "I know Doctor Lecter would do everything in his power to do no harm, and I appreciate it, but I don't want that. I want Hannibal."

Fan-fucking-tastic.

"I'm here," Hannibal says softly, and he still sounds unsure, like Will is spouting nonsense. Maybe he is, maybe the words he's speaking aren't the ones he's hearing, wires crossed, aphasia. Wernicke's aphasia, in fact, but doesn't his ability to remember that negate the diagnosis? Or would his thoughts still be clear? He can't remember, so maybe.

He wants to throw up. Wonders if he will, if he leaned over the side of the bed whether or not it would land on Hannibal's feet. The thought is unacceptable, he'd rather ruin the bed and sleep in his mess than do such a thing to Hannibal.

"You won't be," he whispers. Wants to end this, right now. All of it. The conversation, the interaction, the friendship, the therapy, any and all contact. Maybe, he thinks, if he can do that, he might—might still be alive tomorrow. And the day after. Would Jack be willing to stop consulting with the doctor, if not doing so meant Will's absence? He thinks so, but he's not sure. Is he more valuable, broken and shattered, or Hannibal, so fucking whole all on his own?

"I will always be here, Will," Hannibal says, and rests a hand on Will's side. On his bare skin, like he wasn't in agony enough. "How can I make you believe me?"

The answer hangs between them, so obvious Will doesn't bother answering. Doesn't think he can; his body is so heavy, he is so tired, and without the pain to keep him tethered, not even his humiliation or inevitable heartbreak are enough to give him the energy to stop this.

“All you have to do is ask.” Hannibal’s words are so quiet, so gentle, again making Will feel wild and untamed. Dangerous, in what he can do to himself with these words in his head. The things he wants to do.

Why is he still fighting when he is so tired. Why not give in. Why not have one good night, one perfect night, a window into what will never be. Why not go out with a bang. He’s so tired.

“Do whatever you want with me,” he says, and means it. More than he’s meant anything else today, or any other day.

Hannibal doesn’t answer, and for a moment Will thinks he’s leaving, that what Hannibal wants to do with him is nothing at all—*good riddance, that’s what I’ve been saying from the start*. Then his hands return, on his left foot, not his back. Apparently what he wants to do with Will is tenderize him. That’s fine. Maybe he can sleep, drift away and not come back. Have this be his last memory.

He works his way up Will’s leg, carefully bending and flexing his ankle and knee, loosening his joints. It’s wonderful, and Will doesn’t want it to be wonderful, but it is. Hannibal goes no higher than his lower thigh before switching sides, giving his other leg the same treatment. He sits on the bed to do this, so Will doesn’t have to move. He is so considerate, so kind and thoughtful, Will feels the warmth from his hands and deeper, he thinks. Thinks that’s a dangerous way to think. He’s afraid again, as Hannibal again stops so far below his ass that it must be a statement, an answer to Will’s question. He doesn’t *want* to do anything with Will. This is a professional courtesy, nothing more.

I’m awfully naked to be professional.

He’s not.

It’s true, of course. Will thinks his shirt is probably dry by now, or at least no longer clinging quite so closely, but he can’t turn his head to look. Hannibal takes his hand, and for a moment Will thinks he might have been wrong the whole time and there is something, but he continues the massage, kneading his muscles and stretching his joints, and it’s lovely and terrible at once. Up his arm, across his shoulders, back down the left. When he finishes, he lays Will’s hands carefully back on the bed, and he’s struck again by the gentleness. He doesn’t know why that more than anything is catching at him, maybe because he’s seen what Hannibal looks like when he isn’t gentle, or at least the aftermath—dappled in blood and sweat after killing Tobias Budge, for instance. When he thought Will was dead.

Hannibal rejoins Will on the bed, sits against the headboard. Will can’t see him, and that’s fine. Good, probably. Especially when he says, “On your back, please.”

“No thank you,” Will mutters into the comforter he’s still on top of instead of underneath. He doesn’t want to talk about his arousal, how the gentleness draws it out of him in ways he can’t explain. He doesn’t want Hannibal to see, again, the effect he has. He doesn’t want a conversation. He doesn’t want to move at all, only sleep.

“With your head in my lap,” Hannibal says, like Will hadn’t said no. “Your neck will thank me.”

No it won’t, because I’ll be dead.

“Then do it here,” he says, a little petulantly. He hates himself for the rudeness, but maybe Hannibal will leave sooner.

Hannibal doesn’t even try to convince him, goes straight for the kill. “You said I can do whatever I want with you, and this is what I want. Come here.”

Will doesn’t know how to respond to this, but his body seems to, is moving before he gives himself permission, propelling him first onto his side and then his back. He’s half hard, slapping against his thigh as he scoots up, tentatively rests his head on Hannibal’s crossed legs.

“There you are,” Hannibal says soothingly, and slides his palms under Will’s head, cupping the base of his skull. Gravity forces his neck onto Hannibal’s fingers, and. The angle and care and depth, the gravity assist, the overwhelming feeling of *being held*, literally placing himself in Hannibal’s hands and finding acceptance. He doesn’t try to stop the sigh of relief as his fingers move, stroking along ligaments, pausing every now and then at his pulse, presumably to make sure he’s still alive. Even the ache of his cock is pleasant, more tingling than painful, and maybe he really is relaxed, because he can’t bring himself to care that the longer this goes on, the more he fills out. Or maybe he’s numb again, but would that really feel good?

Not good, but maybe a relief.

He’s too tired to chase the thought down, try to figure out what he meant. Hannibal has reached his shoulder and moves back to his neck, and he gasps quietly, hips flexing up without his permission. Hannibal has the courtesy to ignore this and moves down his chest. Will wants to strangle him, be strangled by him. He hasn’t had a massage before, but he didn’t think they usually involved pectoral muscles. Sports massage, maybe.

Then again, he had been lying on his chest for so long his ribs were starting to flatten, before Hannibal forced him to move. He doesn’t think he knew that he, or anyone, held tension in their chest, but again, the ever-present anxiety, so deeply ingrained in his soul that he doesn’t feel it anymore, continues to slip away. He knows any change in breathing will be more than obvious, and Hannibal will likely notice before he has the chance, so he focuses on that, and not on how Hannibal brushed over a nipple, no doubt accidentally, only his hands are never accidental.

He feels the bead of precome gathering, feels the moment it starts the slow slide down his shaft, expels a sharp gasp, thinks that’s the opposite of his goal.

“Do you want me to stop?” Hannibal asks, and for the first time he sounds like he means it. Like he wouldn’t argue, wouldn’t cite research studies on the benefits of physical intimacy, wouldn’t push. Will can’t figure out what this means and is nearly frantic at the idea of misinterpretation. Not Doctor Lecter anymore, is that it? Doctors order, friends consent. Maybe he does this for all his friends, right down to fucking them, because he likes to help

and care and provide. Will isn't special. Or maybe he wants to know for himself, for personal and private reasons, and that might be Will's favorite option, because he can't think of a reason why Hannibal would care, unless he *cared*.

"Will?"

He winces, bites his lip, clenching and releasing his ass in a vague attempt for contact, or because he can't help it. His name sounds *so good*, low and dark and thick like maple syrup poured over his body to be licked off. He has to say something, if he doesn't this will stop, and.

No.

He definitely doesn't want that.

Will shakes his head, eyes still closed. Says what he said before, the meaning entirely different now. "Not yet."

Hannibal carefully lifts Will's head to slide out from under him, places him down so gently. Like he's shattered and been put back together, but the glue still needs to cure. It's almost worth the distance. He tells himself he knew he'd feel the loss, that was the reason why he shouldn't be doing this, but he is still unprepared for the black hole surrounding him.

It doesn't last. Hannibal strokes a hand down his side, spreading goosebumps like wildfire. Will is sure he can see the shifting of his muscles as he skims over his hipbone, down the dip of his pelvis. Will twitches again, so fucking obvious as a string of precome falls to his abdomen. Hannibal ignores it—*why*—and continues down to thigh, where he settles and resumes the massage.

No part of this situation is relaxing.

Hannibal doesn't want him, but is content to ignore Will's desire. That—that sounds like a doctor, he thinks, compartmentalizing so neatly. Doctor Lecter wants him to feel better, deftly ignoring how his thighs tremble from holding still, how despite that he can't stop the tiniest rocking, as inescapable as breathing. This isn't okay, this is what he didn't want, but.

But it's so good, and the torture just makes it better.

Will is disgusted by himself. He says nothing as Hannibal moves around the bed, tends to his other leg. Then what? Nothing left to touch, he'll have to stop, be forced to directly address the situation.

I'm going to make dinner, and unspoken, leaving you alone to jerk off, because you do not deserve the company of anyone, let alone myself.

You should be feeling well enough to come downstairs with me while I cook, and underneath you'll just have to stay like that while we both pretend you aren't, does that make you uncomfortable? Tell me more.

I'm glad you're feeling better. Unfortunately, your attraction to me—while perfectly understandable—requires me to recuse myself as your psychiatrist and friend. Goodbye, Agent Graham. And leaves.

Instead, Hannibal taps his thigh and says, “Turn over.”

Will doesn't know what to do with this or himself or Hannibal or existing. He screams *why?!?!?*, will not let himself vocalize the question. If he disgusts Hannibal so much, he can leave. If he doesn't want to see Will's reaction, he doesn't have to look.

“Now.”

The commanding note is too much and Will does, muffling his groan at the first contact of his dick against the blankets, again as he settles his weight. He's panting now, every muscle tightened to keep himself still, and Hannibal must think he's being kind, giving him a moment to himself, but it only prolongs the torture.

Why am I here??

“I skipped this, before,” Hannibal says quietly, and there's something there, in his voice. Will ignores the meaning, focused entirely on tone and identifying the abnormality. He's hesitating, drawing out Will's curiosity, driving him mad.

That's all the warning he gets before Hannibal's hands descend on his ass, deep strokes down tense muscles, kneading out the tension. Laughable. Will moans again, pushes up into his touch, asks himself what the fuck he thinks he's doing, answers, *no fucking clue*. This is a massage, yes, clearly, Doctor Lecter's intentions more than obvious. Then why did he sound apologetic, why say he skipped it unless there was a reason, and doctors don't need reasons. Hannibal, could it be that it was Hannibal's hands manipulating him so cleverly, sometimes drifting up to his lower back, sometimes down to the tops of his thighs. Will knows, *acutely*, that Hannibal skipped it. Why bring it up again? Why?

“It's easier, like this,” Hannibal says, and Will has no idea what he's talking about until the bed moves around him, the weight settling on his legs, and Hannibal's hands returned, now working the other side.

Straddling him.

Will squeezes his eyes shut, even though they already were, and pressed against the pillow. He whimpers, more distress than pleasure. His hips buck up again. *Why*, he thinks dully, and immediately the answer is parroted back to him.

It's easier like this.

No doubt, but that hadn't stopped him before, from sitting on the bed and not on Will on the bed. He's clenching his jaw so tightly he can hear his teeth cracking, bites the inside of his cheek instead. He tastes copper, a hint, more than enough to draw another moan.

I don't want to be here, Will thinks desperately. *I want this more than anything, I don't think I've ever wanted to be anywhere as much as I want to be here.* This is a perfect, tortured heaven, where Lucifer overthrew Michael and rewrote the afterlife using W.W. Jacob's short story as inspiration. Everything he's ever wanted in ruins at his feet.

Don't forget to say thank you.

He pushes the thought away. Can't speak anyway, what's the point.

Hannibal returns to Will's back, now that he has the easier angle, Will thinks. It's fucking glorious, he's never been so relaxed, always wound so tightly, the comforting weight of Hannibal keeping him from floating away. He also feels how Hannibal is dressed, the wool of his trousers against Will's hips and thighs, knows all about his shirt already, and doesn't feel any evidence that he's enjoying himself, has no reason to believe this is any different than any other treatment.

Except.

I'd do anything for you.

I should have come sooner.

I skipped this, before.

Not this part, he hadn't. Not his back.

Will realizes he's been rutting against the mattress, can't think clearly enough to know if he should stop. He feels taken care of. He's heady with the idea, more aroused by that than whatever friction he's managing. He is safe.

I am safe, Will thinks. *I am actually safe. I have never been safe, but I'm safe now.*

The voice tries to ask if he knows that it won't be forever, only now. That it isn't Hannibal's job to keep him safe. That he's going to leave, soon. Will pushes it away. Tries to. Focuses on Hannibal's hands, long fingers splayed across his back, hot and insistent. He must know that the pain is gone, there's nothing left for him to fix. But he's still here.

"You can stop," Will says, hears the sleepiness in his voice, and the defeat.

"You said I can do what I want with you," Hannibal says again. He keeps saying that, like he's checking with Will that he did, in fact, say such a thing. Will doesn't understand why; he finally gave in, why not take his prize and go?

What prize?

My dignity, Will thinks immediately, then adds, *my heart, I guess. He can have that too, I don't need it without him. Might as well take my balls while he's at it.*

"What do you want to do with me?" he murmurs, it takes so much effort to think and speak.

“I want to make you feel better,” Hannibal says, and Will sighs. He knows. He keeps repeating that, too. “I want to help.” Also that.

He says nothing else, but his touch is light, distracted. Fingers drifting along Will’s back aimlessly. It feels divine, another blessing he doesn’t deserve.

“Say something else,” Will says. He doesn’t mean to speak, like how Hannibal doesn’t mean to be stroking him, but here they are. He thinks. “Something different.”

“I want to make you feel good,” Hannibal says softly, and Will shivers. Feels again the clothing separating them. If he asked, would Hannibal strip? He thinks so; that can’t be as extreme as fucking. He could blame it on sensory issues without entirely lying, disguise himself in mental illness.

Because otherwise you’re totally functional and more or less sane.

Nothing about this is sane, Will thinks.

Then why pretend?

The thought is freeing. Worryingly so. Will shouldn’t be free, he needs to be contained, kept in one piece. Tamed. Otherwise his mouth runs wild.

“Then do.”

Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck why.

Why not. You fuckup.

He hears fabric rustle, will *not* look to see why. He’s too tired and he’s too terrified and he’s too tired to be terrified. He thinks Hannibal is probably taking off his shirt. Will has seen him, before, but never at rest, and usually near death. He will look soon, he promises himself. Maybe if Hannibal would say something, instead of maybe undressing, Will would feel a little more confident. As it is, a mere glance could kill him.

“I’m going to ask you five questions,” Hannibal says, and suddenly Will is free, desperately, horribly free. He does look now, doesn’t think twice, and watches as Hannibal slides his trousers off and carefully folds them. He’s wearing crimson silk boxer briefs and black socks, and seems about to shed the rest. Will is transfixed. “You will answer me clearly and honestly. If at any time I feel you’re holding back or obfuscating, we stop.” He meets Will’s eyes as he asks, “Understand?”

Will swallows dryly. Nods.

“One. You will answer verbally, so I cannot misunderstand.” He lays his pants on the dresser, reaches down for his socks.

“Okay,” Will whispers. He meant for there to be some oomph behind it, a challenge, but. His world is narrowing very rapidly to include nothing but himself and Hannibal, and he feels

safe, and so he sounds like it. He sounds soft, and vulnerable, and he wants to hate himself but he can't muster the energy.

Hannibal takes off one sock, stops to fold even that, and Will smiles. A real smile, natural and affectionate. He sees Hannibal see, sees how *he's* pleased at his approval. "Two. Are you capable of making decisions in your own best interest, or are you still too self-destructive?" Will's smile falters, and he quickly adds, "I won't judge you, I only want an accurate picture of your mental state."

Will admits it's a good question. Quietly, to himself, where Hannibal can't hear. He considers it seriously, watching Hannibal fold his other sock. He wants to be, and maybe that's enough. "I think so."

Hannibal smiles, baffling him. "Thank you, *mylimasis*, for your honesty." There's that word again, and Will is coherent enough to think it's probably Lithuanian. Hannibal leans back against the dresser, apparently not undressing the rest of the way, for unknown and tragic reasons. Will forgets about it again. "Three. Are you clear-headed enough to consent? Or not, as you'd like." Will wants to laugh. He doesn't think he's capable of not consenting, or not wanting to. Hannibal has nothing to worry about.

"I'm completely functional and more or less sane," Will says, and Hannibal's smile widens. He can't stop himself from basking in his light. His own personal star to revolve around. Beautiful.

"Four. Physically, how is your body?" Hannibal asks, pointedly maintaining eye contact and not looking lower. "Your back, any lingering pain, whether you need food or sleep."

Will thinks. He is tired.

But this is more important.

"You fixed my back," he says. "No pain. Little pain," he corrects at Hannibal's look. "I'm not hungry, and I don't think I could eat." He licks his lips unconsciously, only noticing when Hannibal's eyes turn down a fraction of a degree. He flushes. "I could wait, to sleep. If I had a reason." He sounds small, and it scares him, how much he likes it. How he's already addicted to this, would die without it.

He doesn't want to die, if life has this surrender.

Hannibal nods like he expects this. "And five. What is that reason?"

Will tenses, breaks eye contact. *You have to tell the truth, you promised him. You absolutely cannot tell him the truth, he will leave.* Running on infinite loop.

He'll stop, he thinks desperately. *If he thinks I'm holding back. He can't—can't stop, not now, not here. Can't.*

"I love you," Will says, shocking them both. His face is numb, pins and needles, especially the tip of his nose and his lips. Is that what he'd said, really? In reality? The permanent,

forever one? That's what he'd said? Really? Really? For real? Hannibal's eyes have widened and his nostrils flare and Will thinks, *he's scenting me, to know if I'm telling the truth.*

"I love you," he says again, because now there's no reason not to, and years of contained declarations have worn him down. Truth time, baby. Buckle up. "That's not why—I wasn't having a breakdown about you." *Mostly*, he adds silently. "Just so you know. I just...I got tired. I'm still tired, now, but it's not as bad. Not as overwhelming." That's it, that's why small and safe and surrender. He actually does want to tell Hannibal this, but he can't find the right words to explain. Gathering his strength, he says instead, "Because you're here," even though he's not, because Hannibal is still at the dresser, watching from a distance. "It's okay to be tired around you," he says, praying it doesn't sound like a question. "I feel safe with you. Clearer. More in focus." *Yes, because he takes away the pain and despair, leaving you able to say things like I love you like a fucking lunatic.* Will takes a steadying breath and steels himself. "I'm not going to crumble if you reject me and leave. You can stay, if you want, but only if you're Hannibal. I've had enough of Doctor Lecter."

He is very aware of the fact that he has never been more brave, never said something so audacious and presumptuous before, ever, in his life. He's been less anxious walking into armed hostage situations than he is now. And Hannibal still hasn't moved.

"Not forever, I hope." His voice is deep and dark and Will is glad he's lying down so he doesn't swoon.

"No," he agrees. "Not forever. But for tonight. I guess that's my answer, or question, if I get one. Who you are." Brave, so brave. Or stupid. *And* stupid, the voice corrects.

He senses Hannibal's intent before he moves, pushing away and slowly stalking towards Will. He can see the atoms parting to make room for his passage.

"I am Doctor Lecter," he says. "At work, and when I'm needed." Will swallows thickly. "I am Hannibal, your friend and confidant, always." His eyes flash dark and he hesitates, seeming to struggle with something.

"No holding back," Will says, mouth dry. "Your rule."

The darkness builds, steals Will's breath. He sees shadows of antlers, inhales the smell of pennies. Then Hannibal blinks and it's gone, and part of Will is disappointed. Most of him is grateful to be spared long enough to sleep and eat, and will gladly wait until tomorrow for whatever Hannibal needs to tell him.

"Later," Hannibal says, and drops the crimson pants. Will whimpers. Needs. Is sufficiently distracted.

"And?" he asks breathlessly. "Right now?"

"Now, I am yours, and I will answer to whatever you call me."

He's completely serious, Will realizes. This is real, he has said things, and now so has Hannibal, in real life. For real. He's almost positive it's real. Doesn't want to ask, in case

Hannibal revokes his consenting privileges.

“Come here,” Will says roughly, and he does. Will sits, grabbing Hannibal’s face and crashing their lips together, moaning dangerously at the heat and the reality and the heat and the taste and the *heat*, was Hannibal’s mouth an oven, was that the secret to his cooking. Hannibal growls lowly, returns the kiss with equal passion, biting at Will’s lips, forcing his tongue into his mouth. One hand goes to the back of Will’s neck and then he shoves, and Will falls onto his back, breathless, still anchored to Hannibal, whose other hand is supporting himself, so he doesn’t crush Will completely, he thinks.

The weight of Hannibal is a fucking holy sacrament. He really is safe after all, held in place so he can’t ever leave. Can’t be reached by the outside world. Only Hannibal finds him.

He found you, the voice says, and it has lost some of its bite. *On the floor. And now he’s here.*

Yes, Will thinks fiercely. He bites Hannibal’s tongue, not enough to draw blood but so that he jerks back enough that Will can take charge of the kiss, map the interior of Hannibal’s mouth. *Yes, yes, yes.*

Are you sure? The voice is hesitant but undeniable. Will tangles his fingers in Hannibal’s hair, pulling him closer. *Did he actually say how he feels about you? What this is, if anything?* He squeezes his eyes shut, convulsively pulls Hannibal’s hair, gets an approving moan in return. Good to know. *Did he specifically say you aren’t friends? Unorthodox friends? Or did he let you confess your love twice over without returning it*, obfuscated his title and role, and took out his dick to distract you? Successfully, I might add.

Will tenses. He can’t help it. There’s a logic there, at least enough to convince his half-gone self. Mostly-gone. He feels Hannibal feel it, how he’s about to pull away, ask questions. Accuse Will when he’s the one who refuses to take responsibility. He doesn’t want it, scratches almost frantically at Hannibal’s scalp, which only makes him pull back with more purpose.

“No,” he whispers, finding Hannibal’s eyes, holding the fire within. “Don’t go.”

Hannibal ignores him and asks, “What’s wrong?” His lips are red and kiss-bitten, he isn’t able to fully catch his breath, and still, entirely unbothered by his state. His focus is solely on Will, who searches the fire of his gaze. He sees only worry, and desire.

Let that be enough. It is enough. Don’t do this.

The voice is a duplicitous little bitch, and Will speaks just to spite it.

“Do you love me?”

Hannibal smiles. It’s automatic, comes before any thought or planned action, and Will relaxes, mostly. Any form of love is far past what he deserves, he doesn’t need specifics.

He does, and Hannibal knows it.

“Yes, my love,” he says softly, leans back into Will’s space, nudges Will’s cheek with his nose. Will lets out a sound somewhere between a gasp and a sigh, pushes up into the contact. Hannibal hums approvingly. “In totality, infallibly.” Will sighs again, but it’s more of a whine this time. Hannibal presses a kiss to the hollow of his cheek, his jawline, his pulse. “Until the end of time.”

He knows, Will thinks, and he’s right, even if he’s not sure what he means. Hannibal does know.

“Please,” Will says, and Hannibal does.

He is moved again, Hannibal is so good at that, it seems easier for him to move Will than it is for Will to move himself. He is laid out on the bed, Hannibal is lying on him, kissing him, ensconcing him, and Will thinks, *I could do this forever*. He shifts, unintentionally aligning their cocks, pressing firmly against each other, and he moans, and Hannibal echoes him. He might like to do this forever, but that’s not going to happen. He’s not going to last. Especially because Hannibal is so *wet*, precome flowing in a steady stream, slicking their movements and making Will heady with Hannibal’s desire. He wants to reach down, feel for himself and maybe have a taste, but it’s too difficult. He listens to them, instead, the wet slide. How when he devours Hannibal like he’s starving, his breath goes quiet and fast and a just little whiny. How when he tilts his hips just right it shakes loose a low growl from Hannibal that nearly has Will coming on the spot. How their heartbeat echoes through the room, just the one, beating for both of them.

Will is alive. He wants to be alive. Actively desires tomorrow, and the day after. He is alive and his blood sings in triumph and everything isn’t okay, but this is. He is alive, and that is okay. Good. It’s good.

“Close,” he breathes into Hannibal’s mouth, rolls his hips to prove the point, whimpers quietly. “Please.”

Hannibal groans softly, buried his face in Will’s neck. Will thinks he’s overwhelmed, and oh god, he’s going to come.

“Like this?” Hannibal asks, and he feels the words like Morse code tapped against his skin.

“Y-yes,” Will says, arching up, keening, reveling in their harmony when Hannibal growls, more felt than heard. “If—” He wants to ask if it’s okay, if he’s too pathetic, if he fucked up, but he can’t make himself. He probably has but at this point it really doesn’t matter, he’ll deal with the consequences later.

“Yes,” Hannibal hisses and sinks his teeth into Will’s neck.

There were so many days of numbness. Nothing wrapped around him like a cocoon. Interspersed with pain, but always returning to nothing.

Will doesn’t feel nothing anymore. He feels *everything*.

His blood spills into Hannibal's mouth in a hot rush, but it doesn't *spill*. He is received as an offering, and the pain comes after, as irrefutable proof of his sacrament. It is nothing like being stabbed and everything like sparklers on the Fourth of July lighting up his darkest night.

He feels his breathless moans catching in his throat. He feels oxygen flooding his system for the first time in days, he's certain. He is fully saturated, fully aware, fully present. Every neuron bright and alive and feasting on sensation. He feels *good*.

His hips stutter against Hannibal's as he shakes, there is no coordination or grace in how he moves, it is primal, in his DNA. He cock twitches and it's almost unbearably, impossibly good, the pleasure spiraling up through him, taking over his body until he glows with it. He can't stay alive much longer, can't teeter on the precipice without falling, and everything is so slow, like his body refuses to feel anything but this agonized ecstasy.

He feels Hannibal's hand between them, take them both in one fist, and Will doesn't need anything else, any friction or pressure. He feels Hannibal's heartbeat in his palm, in his cock, in the rhythm of his thrusts and the way he leaks endless precome over Will's cock.

He feels Hannibal. Sweat-soaked velvet skin burning into him, keeping him warm, the fires of his being alive. He's sucking on the bite, demanding more, and Will offers him everything he has. His sounds are low and feral and dangerous and desperate and grateful, so grateful. Will doesn't know how he can know all of this when he can barely remember his own name, but he feels it in his bones. In the way Hannibal trembles through his orgasm, shaking and rutting helplessly against him.

Will feels, in vivid and undeniable clarity, the moment he turns to light. He is no longer solid or liquid or nothing. He is particles, undefined but held together, a sunbeam on a dusty floor. Hannibal is the dust he turns to stars, neither visible without the other, reflecting and refracting like prisms, scattering light throughout the room. He feels whole and more-than-whole, bigger than himself, joined to something so much greater than he could have ever imagined.

He doesn't come back to himself, doesn't want to. He is so tired, and he is finally, finally at rest. He is held, he is safe. Will sleeps.

4

It's still dark when Will opens his eyes. He's still tired, but the *smell*—he can't identify it any more specifically than *food good food warm good food*. He has no context, isn't sure where he is, but he feels...untroubled. Light. He wants to eat.

Before he can figure out how any of this fits together, the door opens, and Will's heart clenches painfully as everything he's ever wanted walks into the room.

Hannibal is dressed again, in soft pants and a long sleeved shirt, and he is carrying a feast on a wooden bed tray that Will has never seen before. It must be one of his provisions. They're in the guest room, Will remembers, which is why nothing is entirely familiar but he can still hear the dogs moving around downstairs, no doubt disposing of any scraps and stolen treats.

Hannibal smiles when he sees Will is awake, and Will had been wrong, it wasn't still night, darkness wouldn't dare in the ferocity of his blinding light.

Will remembers being light. He smiles back, pushing himself up so he's half-sitting, leaning against the headboard. He's self-conscious and not, ashamed at yet another Will Graham Breakdown Extravaganza, and also something close to peace at knowing Hannibal has seen him at his worst and is still here. He's naked, he remembers, but Hannibal must have cleaned him after he fell asleep, there's no trace of the mess they made.

"Hey," Will says softly. Hannibal seems to take it as permission, closing the distance and carefully laying the tray at the foot of the bed. It smells *so good* and it's from Hannibal, for him, because Hannibal wants to take care of him. He wants to grab, doesn't want to be rude. Wishes Hannibal would hand him his fucking plate before he snaps.

"Hello," Hannibal says, crowding next to Will, facing him. He feels Hannibal's eyes searching him, looking for any cracks that need fixing or misgivings that need soothing or who knows, he is taking so long, Will wants to eat. "How do you feel, *mylimasis*?"

That word again, and again Will is too distracted to ask. "Hungry," he says, staring pointedly at the food.

"And?"

Will sighs. He's still tired. He wants to eat and then sleep more and not be forced into coherency in the middle of the night. "Tired and hungry," he amends.

Hannibal rests a hand on his face, turns him so their eyes meet. Will almost forgets about the food. "Will."

Another sigh. There's no getting out of this. "Embarrassed, surprised—shocked, actually—, nervous, excited, I don't know, Hannibal, everything." It's the truth, still. More quietly than before, not as demanding, but everything that isn't nothing has a place in him. "And a little pissed, because I'm hungry, I think I've mentioned that."

Hannibal chuckles. "Fair enough. You are...here?"

It takes a moment for Will to remember how not here he had been, how far he'd drifted from himself. Hannibal had come for him anyway. "Yeah," he says, takes Hannibal's hand in his own, kisses his fingers. "You?"

"Always," Hannibal says, and Will believes him.

How about that.

"Can I eat now?" Will asks, and Hannibal laughs again.

"Yes, darling, of course."

He listens to the cadence of Hannibal's voice as he explains their meal, the steady rise and fall, how his accent seasons the words like saffron and truffle. He hears none of it, identifies

things like *eggs* and *meat* and *French toast* to make sure your blood sugar is stable. They eat together, and by the time Will finishes his food—and some of Hannibal's, who had tried to be covert about slipping one of his pieces of toast and two sausage links onto Will's plate and failed wildly, leaving Will so enamored with the charade he kept quiet—he's more than ready to go back to sleep.

"Come here," he says, and heat lurches through him at the memory. He flushes. "Under the blankets, come sleep with me."

Hannibal's smile is more of a smirk as he moves the tray off the bed, setting it on the dresser and out of reach of any adventurous dogs. "Yes, please," he says, practically purring as he slides under the blankets, presses himself against Will's side, breathes deeply.

"You'll be here tomorrow?" Will asks, lying down and dragging Hannibal with him, settling himself safely in the circle of his arms. "When I wake up."

"Yes, Will," Hannibal replies, sighing contentedly as they settle into each other. "I'm not so easy to get rid of."

Will snorts. "Yeah, I finally got that." He closes his eyes, and Hannibal turns off the lamp on his side of the bed. Darkness greets him like an old friend instead of something to fear. "Thank you," he mumbles, maybe too quietly to be heard, but he doesn't think so. Doesn't think that exists. "For all of this. Thanks."

Hannibal draws him closer, presses his lips to Will's forehead, doesn't pull away. "*Ačiū*, Will."

Will opens his eyes. "You've never done that before," he says, almost accusingly. He doesn't mean to, but he doesn't understand, and he hates not understanding. "Why?"

"But I'm tired," Hannibal lilts teasingly, and Will looks up at him, frowning slightly.

"I'm serious."

Hannibal sighs indulgently. "You asked two questions. I don't speak Lithuanian for a multitude of reasons, chiefly that I don't have anyone to speak with. Also." Will hears the catch in his throat only because they're pressed together and he is so close. "Not all of my past needs to be given a voice." Will wants to say something, doesn't know what. Kisses the warmth of his chest instead. Hannibal hums quietly. "As to your other question, I'm afraid I don't have an answer that you'll find satisfactory. There was no conscious decision, no plan. I think..." He trails off, and Will thinks he might die waiting for the rest of his sentence.

"When I'm with you, I feel...like I've finally found my way home," he says quietly, slowly, with such care. Will was wrong, he is going to die like this, and it is perfect and he is so grateful. "I suppose there are very old neural pathways deep in my brain that still equate home with the sounds of Aukštaitija." He pauses, considering. "Does it bother you?"

"No," Will says quickly, too quickly, before Hannibal finishes asking. He's blushing, he's sure Hannibal can feel against his chest. "No, it's—good." *Understatement of the year. Try*

again. “It makes me feel good,” he mumbles, Hannibal’s words so awkward in his mouth, like they don’t fit correctly. “I can learn,” he offers.

Hannibal just hums again, like he’s pleased but ultimately has no opinion on the matter. His chest is flushed, though, and his hold on Will tightens minutely. Will smiles, hidden, and lets Hannibal’s heartbeat lull him to sleep.

you came out of the blue like that, i never could've seen you coming, i think you're everything i've wanted

Chapter Summary

Will continues to struggle with himself, so Hannibal shares a secret of his own. They both feel better pretty quick in some pretty fun ways.

+ one small epilogue

5

Again, Will doesn't recognize the room when he wakes. It's so bright and cheery, drenched in morning sun, and untouched by the sourness that he's left in his wake like some kind of slug all week. Hannibal had cleaned him first, that was why, and they christened the bed together. Will assumes; he has no memory one way or the other of having slept here before, can't think of why he would have.

He has only ever woken up here in Hannibal's arms. The feeling of unblemished newness is almost euphoric.

I am become springtime, he thinks nonsensically, dazedly.

Hannibal is still asleep, sprawled over most of the bed and hogging the covers. Will can't help smiling at how the most elegant, respectful, courteous man he knows is tangled in the sheet, the comforter pooled around his waist, one arm draped possessively over Will's chest and thank god for that, because his legs are fully and entirely on Will's side of the bed, leaving him enough room to curl up and not much else. He's facing Will, and he looks so gentle like this, soft in his sleep. It's perfect.

Will's stomach growls, and it's then he remembers he has physical needs. He is hungry, *starving*; he's sore and stiff, would like to take the dogs for a walk, that sounds good; he could do with a proper shower.

He also doesn't want to see the living room floor, not yet. He tells himself that it's embarrassment, and it is, but there's a measure of fear as well, that maybe it would look a little too inviting. He feels good, he doesn't want to jinx it.

And he's hungry, and Hannibal is asleep and pinning him down, and is the one who knows where the food is and what to do with it. He looks so peaceful, it'd be a shame to wake him. He's part of the strange magic of this long-ignored room, and it wouldn't be a shame, it would be a desecration.

Hannibal's eyes open, nearly golden in the light. Will smiles, feeling stupid, and Hannibal returns it lazily.

"Did I wake you?" Will asks, runs his fingers through Hannibal's sleep-messy hair. He hadn't thought Hannibal was capable of messy. He's beautiful messy.

"Mm, I think so," Hannibal mutters sleepily. "I heard you say my name."

"I didn't," Will protests, bemused. "Wanted to, but I didn't."

He frowns slightly, shrugs it off as he wakes up the rest of the way. "You should have," he says instead. "Have you been up long?"

"No," Will says. "A few minutes." He's unsure, now that Hannibal is awake, and he's expected to talk. He can't remember the last time a lover spent the night, likely because he hasn't had a lover or anything resembling one since college. He had no problem getting sex when he wanted it, or how he wanted it—anonymous, and over when it's done. This is new, it takes careful consideration, but he isn't allowed consideration, not yet. Doesn't trust his mind not to twist reality into its preferred distortions. He needs food, time. Maybe a manual on how to be in a relationship. Or how to be a human, period.

Hannibal's concern hasn't gone away. If anything, he looks more worried. "Are you alright?"

You could fuck me.

Alright.

Will flushes, looks away. "Mhm." Too new, so terribly, awe-fully unknown. He wants to be back in Hannibal's embrace where he doesn't need words to talk and Hannibal always knows exactly what he means, but he doesn't know how to ask. If he did, he wouldn't need to. He also wants breakfast, also wants to ask Hannibal to cook, definitely does not want to overstep or be rude. It's his house, he should be the one offering.

He feels Hannibal thinking. Feels as his pieces fit together in Hannibal's mind. And his stomach rumbles, ruining the moment, and he winces, wants to draw into himself, but Hannibal just laughs quietly.

"Would you like something to eat, dear Will?"

Can he say yes? He wants to say yes. It's much harder than anything he said yesterday, his lucidity like a gag shoved too far down his throat. He compromises and nods.

Hannibal drops a kiss on his shoulder and Will shivers at the tenderness. "Rest. I'll be back soon, and I'm downstairs if you need me."

"Always need you," Will mumbles, immediately wishes he hadn't. If he wasn't already in the fetal position, he would have curled up.

"And I you, but that doesn't mitigate the need for breakfast," Hannibal says lightly, surprising him. Maybe more than he should have been, given everything that's happened. He nods

again, and Hannibal finally disentangles himself from the blankets, gives Will space to stretch out.

He doesn't take it. He doesn't want it, it was a stupid idea. He wants Hannibal back.

But he does want to eat. Hannibal will be right downstairs. And apparently he's sane enough to be left alone, and he trusts Hannibal's judgment.

"Can we eat in bed again?" Will asks, trying to match Hannibal's levity, only sounding like a child on the verge of begging.

Hannibal chuckles. "Yes, of course." He pauses, for exactly long enough to get Will's attention, make him roll over to make sure everything is okay. Hannibal is practically glowing, pants still on from their midnight snack and similarly shirtless, and he looks so content, that's what Will wants. The steadiness of his eyes. The surety. The twinkle that means trouble; especially that. "Here, I mean."

Will frowns, trying to force his brain to catch up. Maybe he is still a little tired. Or a little asleep, but he gets there, eventually. Part of him wants to blush and cower and hide; instead he lets a positively lecherous grin spread across his face and asks, "So no rimming in your bed?"

Hannibal's eyes widen, pupils dilating, swallowing the calmness in a vortex of heat. Will thinks he might even stumble slightly, but he isn't familiar with the room and wasn't looking where he was going, so it's hard to pinpoint the cause. He swallows. Will watches.

"There are some exceptions," he says lowly, and Will laughs. He hears the freedom and joy bubbling up from his chest, hardly knows what to do with himself like this. He's more used to the floor than happiness.

"Go," he says, waving a hand at Hannibal and (finally) drawing the blankets up to his chin. They smell like Hannibal. So does the pillow and the mattress and, Will realizes, probably so does he. Maybe he doesn't need a shower after all. While he's still feeling brave, he says, "There was something else you wanted to say last night, what was it?"

Hannibal freezes in the doorway. *He is so beautiful*, Will thinks with no worry or fear. Whatever he is going to say, Will welcomes it with open arms. Hannibal must see the acceptance in his eyes, because his response is horribly, delightfully casual.

"I'm the Chesapeake Ripper," Hannibal says with a small, queerly teasing smile. "And I'm going to make you breakfast. We can talk over our meal, if you'd like." He's halfway down the hallway before Will can think of anything to say, and he yells it after him, like everything is perfectly normal.

"Is the breakfast people?"

His footsteps stop. Will waits, not knowing what he wants to hear, Hannibal's silence answer enough. Will might not know if he does answer, blood rushing through his ears like rapids during flood season. Drowning out the world.

“Some of it,” Hannibal says, and his footsteps continue down the hall and stairs, where Will stops listening and turns inward.

He isn’t surprised that he isn’t surprised. Hadn’t he spent months telling anyone who would listen—and more who wouldn’t—that Hannibal was the Ripper? People had died over his accusations. Friends. They had been *eaten*, because Will was right.

He glances at the tray on the dresser. Wonders who Hannibal fed him in the middle of the night.

The ear was a poem, he thinks, almost at random.

Oh my god. Oh Jesus fuck. Christ.

A normal person would turn him in, the voice says, speaking up for the first time since he’d woken. *A normal person would be afraid.*

I am not normal, Will Graham thinks firmly, feeling more sane than he has in months. Of course he’s not going to turn Hannibal in or make any accusations, he finally has him. In every way, like Hannibal said. By any name.

His psychiatrist, Doctor Lecter.

His friend, Hannibal.

His everything, in this bed.

His Ripper.

His.

Will groans, buries his face in his pillow. Musk and sweat and sex and blood and ambergris fill his lungs like nitrous. He might scream, he might laugh, he might anything. He *can* anything, now. With his everything by his side, or downstairs cooking.

Cooking people.

Yes, cooking people. He should be disgusted, doesn’t bother to pretend he’s anything but hungry, a little tired, and possibly a lot lovesick but he’s not quite willing to admit that one yet. He should shower, he’s a mess, and the parts of himself that still need to reform will fit together more easily with hot water to ease the way.

He fed you people jerky yesterday.

Yes, he did. And it was delicious.

Will sits up, stands, stretches. He’s already naked, saving himself time. He crosses to the bathroom and turns on the shower, adjusting the water to his standard near-boil. He hums while he waits, one hand under the spray. The melody is Hannibal played a few weeks ago, on one of Will’s last good days in the sea of grey, before he started his final descent. He’d

gone over for dinner after therapy, and while the food—(*people*)—was in the oven, Hannibal found his way to the piano while Will browsed his library. He had wanted to ask the name of the piece at the time, didn't know how without saying *so I can listen to it when you aren't around and pretend you are*. He can ask, now.

He can ask anything at all.

The water is hot. Will showers.

6

By the time he emerges from the bathroom, damp hair flopping in his face and a towel around his waist, he can smell breakfast. His stomach growls in anticipation, and he walks a little lighter knowing he'll be eating soon. A lot safer, as well. It came to him in the shower, like all true thoughts: Hannibal has killed for him. Many times. Seems like he'd be happy to do it again.

That isn't supposed to be comforting. Will doesn't care. He's had precious little comfort in his life, and he no longer has any interest in questioning his own motives. They're always the same; a fucked up childhood leading to a fucked up adulthood, the details irrelevant. What matters is the reality, *his* reality, and shaping it to his design. If his reality includes knowing deep in his bones and heart and soul that he will always and forever be cherished, protected, and provided for by a cannibalistic serial killer, well.

Good for him. He fucking deserves it.

Hannibal joins him not long after, balancing plates with the confidence of a career waitstaff, swapping out the empty dishes on the tray with the new ones, loaded with—

people

—so much food that, ravenous as he is, Will isn't sure he'll be able to finish.

"What is it?" he asks.

Hannibal's reply is careful. "Croque monsieur with a side of French onion soup."

"It smells wonderful," Will says, and some of the tension leaves Hannibal's stance. He isn't sure what constitutes rude in this new world, but he can't help himself from cautiously asking, "Who is it?"

"Nobody you know," Hannibal says, making himself look very busy even though Will is pretty sure he's just rearranging the plates on the tray. "A flight attendant."

"Why?"

"He was rude." He finally turns, tray in hands, somehow still hesitant. He holds it out slightly, eyebrows raised. Can't seem to verbalize the question.

“Bringing me food and taunting me with the details while holding it out of reach seems pretty rude to me,” Will says, and the tension drains from Hannibal’s body. It’s only a few steps, and he joins Will leaning against the headboard, legs crossed neatly to make room for the tray. He can be compact, then, when it suits him. Will stores the information away for whenever they next spend the night together.

“Do you want to know?” Hannibal asks, eyes meeting Will’s as he takes his first bite. Will’s mouth waters, and at first all he can do is watch Hannibal chew. Eventually he nods. “I was getting gas and he bumped my car. I gave him the opportunity to apologize, which he did not take. So I offered him my business card, in case he wanted to seek treatment for his anger displacement issues. He never called.”

Will considers this. If such a common slight deserved such a severe punishment.

“Would you like a taste?”

He nods. He’s eaten human meat before, he has no idea how many times or who has passed through his digestive system, but intentionally, willfully, this will be his first time. Consensually.

Not for the flight attendant, the voice tries.

Fuck off, Will thinks, and accepts the bite Hannibal offers, feeding him from his fork instead of handing it to him. He closes his eyes, tries to pinpoint the difference between flight attendant and pig. All he tastes is the juicy succulence of the meat mixing with egg and bread and seasoning. If Hannibal hadn’t told him, he never would have known.

He tastes that, too. The shared secret. The taboo. For good reason, he’s not stupid, he understands why cannibalism is bad. He also understands, now, the darkness ever-present in Hannibal’s eyes, in how he holds himself. It’s only cannibalism if both parties are human; the meat is little more than pig, and Hannibal is so far past human. Standing by his side, beckoning his own monster to the surface.

“Well?” Hannibal prompts after a few moments. “What do you think?”

“It’s delicious, your cooking is always exquisite.” He searches Hannibal’s eyes, amber yes, the color of something wild and untamed. Not human. He feels safe. “My thoughts are—abnormal.”

Hannibal smiles. “Yes, I figured that out on my own.” Will glares, and Hannibal just grins. “Are you concerned?”

“I think I should be,” he says, and starts on his own food. “But I’m not.”

“Should *I* be concerned?” he asks, and Will isn’t sure if he means the depression or the murder. Almost laughs, doesn’t.

“No,” Will says plainly, and digs in. He has no idea what he’s done to deserve his own personal chef, but what a perk. A comfortable silence falls between them, broken by the clink

of silverware and the occasional bark from outside.

It could always be like this, Will thinks. It's a terrifying thought, because it could be, he's pretty sure, if he doesn't fuck it up. But he is very good at fucking up, and he's absolutely certain he couldn't survive another parting. They have been taken from each other, often by each other, too many times. He won't do it again, won't sit idly by while anyone else tries. He will fight tooth and nail to keep Hannibal at his side, except. Except if he fucks it up, fights himself, loses everything.

Then don't, he thinks, and Will isn't sure where this new voice is coming from or whose confidence it stole, but he likes it.

He likes less the idea that there is time after breakfast. Unstructured, unknown time, and while Hannibal expects precious little from him when it comes to social interactions, it's so new and different and raw and necessary and vital, and he cannot fuck it up. He will try his best, but also, he cannot. Failure is not an option.

"I'm gonna take the dogs for a walk," he blurts out, looks at Hannibal. "After I'm done eating. I'm not sure when they last had my undivided attention, and I could use a walk, stretch my legs, y'know."

Hannibal nods. "It's a beautiful morning, crisp, not too cold."

Will nods back, trying to figure out what he's missing. It's so much easier deconstructing a murder scene than breakfast in bed.

"I need to finish the last of the dishes—"

"No you don't," Will interrupts. "You cook, I clean. That's how it works, right?"

Hannibal seems amused, and maybe something else Will can't place. "It can work that way, if you'd like. But today it falls to me as I need to repack them, and you need to walk your dogs. I don't mind, I assure you. In fact, I find it meditative."

"You would," Will says, smiling despite himself. "If you really want, be my guest." *Repack*. Yes, because he'd be going home, and needs his dishes. Because Hannibal doesn't live here, nor Will there. This is where he falters, at the line between what he wants (*craves, needs, aches for and finds nourishment at the sight of*) and what is socially acceptable to want from a relationship barely twelve hours old.

But it's so much older, the new voice says, the one that sounds so much like a snake offering an apple. *Come, Will. From the moment you met, remember? There's always been something. Don't sell yourself short. Besides, you don't know how time passes in his head, how quickly monsters move. He has seen you for so long, do you really think it feels like a matter of hours to him?*

There was a logic to that, maybe. At first. But the deterioration rang truer.

"Will you be here when I get back?" Will asks eventually.

“Would you like me to be?” Hannibal asks, busying himself with the last of his soup and not looking at Will.

“I’d like a real answer,” he says, unsure if that’s true.

“I don’t want to overstep,” Hannibal says, and Will stares at him, eyebrows raised, mouth slightly open. He flushes, otherwise makes no comment.

“Hannibal.” He glances at Will for a split second before returning to his soup. “*Hannibal*. You gave me a bath.” Will is mildly amused that this is what comes out of his mouth. Hannibal has done so much, today and yesterday and every other day. Their relationship is based on overstepping. It’s what makes Will feel safe, because maybe he gets framed for murder more than he used to, but he knows, truly knows, that he will always be rescued. That’s overstepping, probably. Of a kind.

But no. The bath is more intimate than the ear shoved down his throat while he was drugged and dying and unconscious.

Hannibal is trying not to smile, and Will can see—god, everything, Hannibal is so transparent now, a diamond shaped into an almost-human figure, D-grade clarity sparkling under the laser of Will’s eyes. So he sees the smile, and sees the uncertainty beneath it.

“That was—”

Will shakes his head, interrupts. “It wasn’t different. Nothing is different.” Hannibal tilts his head, regards Will. It’s fair, everything is different, what is he talking about. “I mean.” He’s distracted by the morning light refracting through the prism sitting next to him. He keeps thinking this, but fuck, Hannibal is so beautiful, how is he supposed to think about anything else? “I’m here,” he says. “And so are you.”

Fucking brilliant.

“Yes,” Hannibal says, still studying Will. Waits for him to get his words together.

He feels the drain start. The inevitable spill. Not good enough, can’t even form sentences. Useless.

Shut. The fuck. Up, Will thinks firmly.

“Everything I want to say is too much,” he says, because honesty has served him well so far. “But yeah, I’d like you to be here.”

“What else do you want to say?”

Will sighs, rolls his eyes. “Statements.” Hannibal looks confused, and he adds, “Instead of questions.” He’s cleaned his plate and bowl without realizing, stretches. He feels good, still. A walk with the dogs sounds perfect. But he wants to finish this, whatever it is.

“Tell me,” Hannibal demands, and that isn’t fair at all, Will is the one trying to make demands. “You are never too much, you’re exactly as you should be. So tell me.”

Fuck it, fine. He asked for it.

“Don’t go,” Will says. “Be here when I get back. Every day. Or—I can be with you, in Baltimore, as long as the dogs are looked after. I don’t want—not you, I hate it.” He laughs a little, hints of hysteria around the edges. “I just want you.”

Hannibal takes a long time to answer, and the hysteria builds. Threatens to overwhelm. He is so quiet when finally speaks. “I asked you to run away with me, once.”

Will licks his lips, nods. He remembers. Doesn’t remember why he didn’t. Can’t think of a single reason to not have disappeared then. Or now.

Hannibal’s eyes flick up to meet his. He’s scared, Will sees, and he is flooded with power, overwhelming in its totality. He scares the Chesapeake Ripper. Only him. It’s almost enough to make Will want to ruin him, just because he’s the only one who can.

“Are you asking again?” Will asks, and he tries to sound amused and in control, only sounds fittingly ruinous.

“If I thought you would say yes,” Hannibal says, and Will’s heart stops, misses several beats. “I’m asking—*inviting* you, a standing invitation.”

Will leans back against the plain wood headboard, wondering if Hannibal can see how he’s buzzing with anticipation. He’s going to say yes, doesn’t have it in him to say no, doesn’t want to try. Doesn’t want to be reminded of a time when he might have tried. Succeeded. The thought makes him itchy and impatient, and eventually he asks, “To what?”

“Me,” Hannibal says raggedly, still meeting Will’s gaze, and Will. He accepts, drowns in amber, perfectly preserved in this moment until the end of time. “Here, my house, Florence, Cuba—anywhere. Anywhere I am, I want you by my side.”

“Is that how you see me?” Will asks, and at first putting words to something he didn’t dare let himself consider is like forcing boulders from his throat, but with each one the weight is lifted and the blockage is dismantled and soon polished gemstones cascade from his lips. “When you look out the window, do you see rolling vineyards under a Tuscan sky? Or an untouched white-sand beach, the teal-soaked ocean glinting in the light? Just the two of us on one long vacation. Is that your design, Hannibal? To whisk me off my feet and go gallivanting around Europe? How long, do you think, before the FBI sees the trail of bodies in our wake? Until it gets back to everyone here that we’re alive and oh so very well? Because the Ripper wouldn’t be subtle about it, he wouldn’t be able to. He’d need to shove his escape in their face, make sure they understand the luxuriant perfection that is his life. To prove, once and for all, that he’s won. Then, maybe, a quieter semi-retirement from the public eye.”

Hannibal’s eyes are almost fully black and there is nothing soft or gentle about him, or any sign that there once had been. The blackness seeps out of him, draws antlers rising up and up, smoke tendrils beckoning, *inviting*, and Will digs his fingers into the mattress, hold onto it for dear life—no, wait, wasn’t it dear—

“Come here,” Hannibal says, even though they’re only a few inches apart and he can close the distance whenever he chose. It makes Will bold.

“In a minute,” he says, and gets out of bed. Hannibal looks scandalized, and he can’t stop a stupid, goofy smile from spreading across his face. Slowly, with a measure of control he didn’t know he was capable of, he moves the breakfast tray back to the dresser. He luxuriates in the burn of Hannibal’s eyes, the way his upper lip twitches in the hint of a snarl, how his hands keep clenching and releasing.

Will is dizzy with control. He stops at the foot of the bed, fully hard and jutting almost up to his stomach, red and leaking. He knows how he must look, sees it in Hannibal’s eyes. Sees how tightly he’s wound, how difficult it is for him to hold back, but he does. For Will. And he doesn’t even have to ask.

“Isn’t that what you want?” Will asks gently. Kindly, if condescending. He marvels at the self Hannibal draws from him, a Will who is brave and confident and in control. A Will who sees pleasure in pain and beauty in the wretched. “To take me away from here?” Hannibal nods tightly, eyes never leaving Will’s, and the bottomless blackness is so lovely that it makes him generous. “Then take me.”

Hannibal wraps around Will, and Will sighs in relief. He lets Hannibal pull him into bed, onto his lap, and straddles him gratefully. The kiss is almost languid, acknowledging the infinite nature of the immortal while still paying heed to the unbearably human *need*, Will has never felt so needy and so complete at the same time. Hannibal’s hands are on his back, keeping him close, and Will pulls at Hannibal’s waistband, can’t think why he’s wearing pants, it’s so *rude*.

“Off,” he grunts, letting go, and it snaps against Hannibal’s skin. He doesn’t mean for it to be provocative or rude, doesn’t mind that it is. Hannibal’s hands have moved down to his ass, squeezing and spreading, and his face is in Will’s neck, and Will *needs*. “Fuck me, please, I need you, fill me, *please*, get these fucking—pants—*off*.”

The sound Hannibal makes is inhuman, an animalistic fury at being denied, even though Will is the one begging. It isn’t fair, it’s so beautiful and terrifying and exhilarating, and he’s *still wearing the fucking pants*. Will rises to his knees hands on Hannibal’s shoulders, and demands: “*Off*.”

Hannibal whips them off with a grace Will could never hope to have, and he moans desperately at the sight before him, loses himself. Hannibal is *so* hard, flushed dark crimson turning purple at his head, an almost obscene amount of precome sliding down his cock.

“Will,” Hannibal says, almost pleads, and Will realizes time skips for him as well, he has no idea how long he’s been staring. He feels present, real in a way he’s not used to, needs to memorize every detail of the perfection before him.

Hannibal draws him into a kiss, and Will does the only thing he can think to do—line himself up and sink down onto Hannibal, melting into his mouth, hips stuttering uselessly as he tries to adjust, every breath a near-scream of pleasure-pain.

Beneath him Hannibal is frozen, and it takes Will another minute or two to realize how much effort he's putting into staying still. Giving him the time he needs. Will kisses him again, harder, rocking in tiny motions, unable to stop himself.

He is full. He is whole. He is one.

They are light.

"A-are you alright?" Hannibal asks, winded and crackled. Strangled.

"Yeah," Will breathes, and he can barely understand himself, so quiet and mumbled. Hannibal seems to get it, though, and that's what matters. "Yeah—oh *fuck*, Hannibal—"

Another desperate groan. "You have no idea how long I've waited to hear you say my name like that. Like this."

Will whimpers, thinks he has a very good idea of the torture of friendship. He lifts himself, gasping at the friction, and settles back down. He should have let Hannibal prepare him, probably, but they've both been waiting *so long*, and fuck, he was so *wet*, as soon as Will saw they wouldn't need lube, he'd just...dropped. There is pain, yes, significant pain, Hannibal is so thick, it would've been a stretch no matter what, but the constant shifting pressure against his prostate and the hot sting of his rim stretched so violently, it was perfect.

"You feel so good," Hannibal murmurs against his neck, and Will cries out like he's been stabbed. "So tight for me—fuck Will, so good." He whines, shifts again, wants to move but can't yet, perfectly and horribly balanced on the edge of too much. Vaguely, he thinks Hannibal's words are meant to be reassuring, and calm him down, help him relax. They just wind him up more.

Will moves again, readjusting slightly, and something—Hannibal moves too, or he found the right—right whatever, is *so good* he's lit up like a firework, tightens impossibly around Hannibal, who compulsively grabs his hips and pulls him down while thrusting up. Will lets out a sound suspiciously like a scream, arches against Hannibal, and starts fucking himself. The burn is still there, more present than not, but it's irrelevant, only augments the pleasure as he lifts himself and drops back into Hannibal's lap. His constant groans of pleasure nearly drown out Hannibal's equally desperate moans and gasps, and he sounds like heaven.

Will is happy. Deliriously, a purity of mind and soul. He is made of bliss. He thinks he might be glowing.

Hannibal says his name again, breathed out into his ear, and wraps a hand around his cock. Will tightens but it doesn't hurt, it's ecstasy sending him spiraling up up up and oh god fuck Jesus *Christ* he sees the edge of the cliff hurting towards him at impossible speeds, and he jumps.

Will groans as he comes, if a scream can be called a groan. His face buried in Hannibal's neck, grabbing at his hair and scratching his scalp, moulding their bodies together, trapping Hannibal's hand as he spills over both of them in what feels like a nearly endless pulsing

stream. Hannibal is trembling against him, beneath him, and before Will can come down all the way he slurs, “‘M good, you can fuck me.”

Hannibal growls, his free hand clawing at Will’s ass, and it only takes two jerking, desperate thrusts before he follows close behind, Will’s body relentlessly milking his orgasm from him. Will melts against him, moaning softly as he’s filled, rocking gently in his lap. He’s more aware of the arm wrapped around him than the hand around his dick at this point; he feels like he should be floating away, drifting off into nothingness, weightless. But if he is it doesn’t matter, because Hannibal is holding him. Hannibal has him, and only holds him closer as he comes back to himself.

He’s safe.

7

Will sits in the faded yellow chair in his living room, looking at his new rug. It’s easily the most expensive thing he owns, possibly including his car. The name, Hannibal had explained, was *Sunray*, and was by a designer he’d met at a gallery opening in New York years ago. She owed him a favor, he said with a smile Will didn’t trust at all, so it wasn’t any trouble. It was only later, after he left and Will could once again google in privacy that he realized the *small gift from a friend* was worth almost eight grand. There was already a thin but ever-growing layer of dog fur settling into the pile, and it had only been two weeks since he’d shown up with the rolled carpet. Will almost had a heart attack when he’d been *convinced* there was a body in it, but no.

Sunrays.

It’s made of soft yellows and pale pinks, lines gently wiggling out from the center in a sunburst, like a hazy Caribbean sunrise. It glows in the firelight, the same way Hannibal does. *In case it gets difficult again*, Hannibal had said, and Will wanted to be offended, but it was awfully hard when Hannibal had literally brought him a star. Figuratively.

“Everything alright?” Hannibal asks, resting a hand on Will’s shoulder as he walks past, settling in the brown chair, the one that practically matched the twin chairs in Hannibal’s office. It’s funny, the way their tastes overlapped. He’s gotten himself a glass of wine, Will sees with some amusement; neither the bottle nor the glass had been here before Hannibal. It’s amazing what he’s managed to do to Will’s kitchen in only a month.

Will knows it’s been a month, has the calendars to prove it. Time marches on and all. That doesn’t make it feel any less like he’s slipped into an alternate universe, separated by a gauzy curtain that filters time and light into something softer, more manageable. He’d taken a long weekend, then, but has been back at work since. There haven’t been any new Ripper bodies, although Hannibal has promised it won’t be much longer. Something about suspicious timing, but Will’s fairly certain it’s because he doesn’t want to be away from him for the length of a hunt. He tries not to let it go to his head, has failed mightily. There were other cases in the mean time, transparent little things Will works through in an afternoon. Mostly he’s teaching again, and that’s how he likes it.

For the first time in his life, most things are the way he likes. It's a strange sensation, not feeling attacked by his environment at all times, but one he's getting used to. Too used to, maybe, given the frequency of Hannibal's less and less subtle supposed jokes about running away. He's not sure how much longer he's going to be able to laugh it off. *Maybe later*s inevitably turn into *yes now*, at least when Hannibal was around.

Which he is, almost all of the time. Will prefers Wolf Trap, with its acres of silence and the pack of dogs that shatters it. He finds peace in both, more so than if not actual traffic sounds, the concern that there might be traffic near enough to hear. The worn warmth of his house with its old, used furniture and coating of dog fur is preferable to the sharp refinement of Hannibal's home, and mostly they only end up there when Hannibal wants to cook for him. The addition of wine glasses doesn't make up for the appliances themselves, apparently.

Hannibal has been a remarkably good sport about it, given what he's accustomed to. He's only put his foot down once, over the sleeping arrangements. He needs a real bed, he insisted, and a door between himself and the chaos of seven hungry dogs. Will doesn't mind; he'd had a guest room for nobody, now he has Hannibal's room, or maybe it's his own bedroom, he's not actually sure. Hannibal refurnished it in keeping with the rest of Will's home, at least until a closer look revealed the faked distress and the very real thread count Will had laughed at when Hannibal asked his preference.

The bed, he has to admit, is a significant improvement from the cot. Not only is it more comfortable, but the sturdy hardwood hasn't suddenly folded in on them while they were busy, resulting in an undignified tangle and a number of bruises scattered between them. The old bed in the guest room had been pronounced not worth redecorating around, and Hannibal said something very doctorly about the benefits of a new start and a new bed that sounded clever and had nothing to do with anything other than his exacting standards.

Even if it was true.

Will still has bad nights, but not as many. They aren't as bad, the midnights not as dark when he has his shining stars by his side.

"Will?"

He starts, looks up at Hannibal, blushes. He had said something, hadn't he? Will mostly remembers the warmth of his hand on his shoulder, the warmth from the fire he built, the warmth radiating from Hannibal. The warmth of his rug, the one he hasn't had to use, whose light eclipses any old, Will-shaped stains.

"Sorry, what?"

Hannibal sips his wine, and Will recognizes his expression well enough: *is Will having another episode, or has he just wandered off?* It's not his favorite, he's mentioned several times it makes him feel infantilized and like a patient, but he's come to accept it as a necessary evil. In return, he is caught before he can fall and shatter on the floor. Just another of Hannibal's annoying habits that are too lovely to complain about.

"Are you alright?"

“Yes,” Will says honestly, easily, with no hesitation. Hannibal’s face smooths out, and Will smiles. “Are you?”

Hannibal smiles back. “When I’m with you, always.”

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